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TOUT VIENT À LUI
QUI SAIT ATTENDRE

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MONKS-HOLLOW.

A Novel.

"Tout vient à lui qui sait attendre."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
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MONKS-HOLLOW.

CHAPTER I.

MONKS-HOLLOW.

MONKS-HOLLOW, the seat of Sir Robert Caryl, in the lovely county of Downshire, was built upon a rising ground overlooking the village of Monkton, and partly surrounded by hills.

It was approached by a long avenue of chestnuts, and flanked by a wide stone terrace, having at intervals flights of steps, ornamented with large majolica vases filled with flowering plants.

A fine picture gallery ran the length of the house, filled with a collection of rare paintings, gems from the brush of many a

celebrated artist, interspersed with ancestral portraits, for Sir Robert could trace his pedigree through the Wars of the Roses to the reign of the third Edward. The present baronet was a widower.

The time had been when merry children's voices echoed through the great house, and a fair chatelaine had swept through the now closed apartments.

But Lady Caryl had died shortly after her marriage, leaving one son, who grew up wilful and disobedient, and later on almost broke his father's heart by his reckless prodigality and dissipation.

After a wild career abroad, he married a woman of low birth and doubtful reputation, and when Sir Robert learnt the news of this last act of madness, he swore a solemn oath that henceforth his son should be dead to him.

But Sir Robert had a sister, many years his junior, to whom he was devotedly attached. She had married a young lieutenant in the army, and had sailed for

India with her husband, leaving their only child in her brother's care.

The steamer, encountering severe weather on her outward passage, was lost with all hands on board.

Sir Robert never entirely recovered this last terrible shock, but clung with all the love of his bereaved heart to his little nephew, Raymond Vandeleur, whom he looked upon as his own son.

Everyone adored the bright, merry, high-spirited little lad, who kept the old house alive with his pranks, and ruled the household, from his doting uncle and the staid Mrs. Foster, to the stable boy in the court-yard.

Of his son Sir Robert had heard no tidings for some years, but one day, when Raymond was five years of age, he received a letter bearing the French postmark, the sight of which caused him great agitation.

The contents of this note were never divulged, but shortly afterwards Sir Robert left home unattended, and returned in a few

days accompanied by a pale, sallow-looking youth of seven, whom he introduced to the servants as his grandson, Philip Caryl.

The boy never could be induced to speak of his parents, and was remarkably reserved upon the subject of his former life; but Mrs. Foster, being a person of persevering mind, and hating mysteries, discovered by a constant fire of cross-questions that his father had lately died, and that his mother had disappeared some time previously.

Philip and his cousin were never very good friends. The former was morose and ill-tempered, indulging in the most violent fits of temper upon the least provocation, though treated with the greatest kindness and consideration by his grandfather; the latter never, however, professed the same affection for him that he felt for his beloved nephew, Raymond, whose lines had been cast in pleasant places, for after a lively career at Eton and Sandhurst, where, truth to say, he had attracted the notice

of the authorities more by the scrapes he got into than by personal merit, he had obtained a commission in the 15th Plungers, now stationed at Colchester.

Philip was reading for the bar, and had already taken a degree at Cambridge, but he was no more amicably disposed towards his cousin than formerly; it was a generally known fact that Raymond would inherit Monks-Hollow, the property not being entailed, and this greatly embittered Philip's feelings towards him, and added fuel to the fire of jealousy that smouldered within his heart.

CHAPTER II.

HELEN SHAFTO.

EIGHT o'clock chimes out from the clock tower of Monks-Hollow, and the warm July air fragrant with flowers, blows softly in the long windows of the drawing-room, where several guests have assembled to meet Raymond Vandeleur, just home on leave for a few days from Colchester.

Sir Robert is a striking-looking old man, with a snowy moustache and hair, and his eyes are lit up with pride and affection, as they rest upon the upright form of his nephew, to whom he is at present talking.

Raymond Vandeleur bears a strong resemblance to him.

He looks every inch a soldier, is tall, well knit, and muscular, with a well-shaped

head covered with dark-brown locks of regulation shortness.

He has a rather stern mouth, partially concealed by a tawny moustache, a nose of slightly aquiline shape, and a pair of grey eyes which some of the fair sex have been known to aver can darken and deepen in a way eminently dangerous to their peace of mind.

As the clock strikes the hour, Sir Robert pulls out his watch, and remarks, *sotto voce:*

"The Shaftos are late, Ray. Everyone is here but them."

Ray looks somewhat impatiently towards the door, and then turns to address a pretty little dark girl, who is chatting away to a knot of officers just arrived from the neighbouring garrison town.

"We quite missed you in town, Mr. Vandeleur; Helen Shafto made a great sensation this season," she says, as Ray approaches her.

"So I hear, Miss Carisford, I have not

been able to get away for more than a few hours at a time, regimental duties being rather heavy. I quite envied Philip, who was in town for six weeks, and gave me a glowing account of her conquests."

Miss Carisford laughed, and looked up at a man leaning against the door of the conservatory.

"Are you also one of Helen's captives, Mr. Caryl?"

"Pray spare me, Miss Carisford," he returned with a bitter smile; "I am afraid Miss Shafto scarcely deigns to notice so humble a slave," and he turns away with a gesture of impatience and looks out across the dark woodlands, and the yellow corn-fields waving in ripening beauty in the dying sunlight.

He is eight-and-twenty, but looks older; a little over the middle height, with eyes and hair of southern darkness. His face is somewhat effeminate in repose, with its clearly-cut regular features, but when animated, there is a latent power about the

mouth which betokens energy and resolution. His hands are slim and white as a woman's and they involuntarily tighten upon the back of Miss Carisford's chair, as the door opens, and the butler announces, "Sir Felix, Lady Shafto, and Miss Shafto."

Ray Vandeleur's handsome face turns a shade paler as he steps hastily forward to greet them, and a faint pink tinge steals into Miss Shafto's creamy cheek as he addresses a few words to her.

Philip Caryl watches them anxiously, and after shaking hands with her, places her a chair near her friend, Evelyn Carisford.

The background of bright flowers forms a wonderful setting to her youthful loveliness.

She is rather tall and well-rounded, with a marvellous grace in her movements. Her hair of rich gold-brown ripples over a low Greek brow, and her eyes of darkest blue are shaded by black lashes whose upward curve gives an almost infantine sweetness to her face.

Ray's cheek reddens as she accepts a

deep yellow-hearted rose, handed her by Philip Caryl, and places it in her bodice with a deprecating little smile at Mr. Vandeleur.

At this moment the butler announces dinner, and Ray offers his arm to Miss Shafto, Philip taking in Evelyn Carisford.

The dining-room is a long, low apartment, panelled with old oak, the floor of the room partially covered with costly Turkey rugs.

The handsome old silver on the sideboard gleams out from its sombre setting, whilst the table is lavishly adorned with the fragrant blooms of hot-house plants, and masses of green ferns, from amidst which spring delicate Dresden figures bearing clusters of purple grapes aud other fruits.

Ray faces his uncle, and Helen Shafto sits on his right, from whence she can see over the spreading park with its groups of timid deer, and the weird shadows cast by the twilight upon the distant hills.

"When did you leave town, Miss

Shafto?" asks a tall, distinguished-looking man of thirty-six or so, from the opposite side of the table; "I was surprised to hear from Evelyn that you had returned."

"We left yesterday," replies Helen, with a sigh.

"I wonder you could tear yourself away from the attractions of a first season."

"Papa got tired of the noise and late hours, Colonel Vyvyan; he thinks six weeks of London gaiety quite sufficient."

"You seem quite amenable to discipline, Helen," remarks Philip Caryl.

"Pray do not credit me with a large amount of dutifulness," returns she, laughing; "I am afraid I grumbled dreadfully at leaving, but papa was inexorable. However," with a little glance at Ray, "I do not regret it very much now that I am at home."

Ray returns her look with interest, and says something in an undertone which brings the colour to her cheek, at the sight of which Philip bites his lip.

Miss Carisford seems to be enjoying herself; she is engaged in a mild flirtation with Jack Beresford, a good-looking young lieutenant in the same regiment as Ray Vandeleur.

They have met at several balls in town this season, and the little lady, who is rather a coquette, has succeeded in completely enslaving her admirer.

She is an heiress, and the ward of Colonel Vyvyan, who glances at her now and then through the delicate fronds of fern between them, with something of sadness in the droop of his mouth.

He is dearly fond of his pretty ward, though he finds her rather difficult of management at times, she being a high-spirited young lady, who, however, returns his affection with all the warmth of her heart.

"Have you heard that Beech-hurst is let, Lady Shafto?" asks the Colonel; "you remember the Redgraves whom we met last year in Rome?"

"Yes, indeed," exclaims Evelyn; "Lady

Redgrave is lovely, and Guardy fell quite in love with her."

"There is some story about her, is there not?" asks Jack Beresford.

"I believe so; but Sir Jasper Redgrave has taken Beech-hurst, and they are coming down next week I hear."

"I shall be charmed to renew my acquaintance with her," says Lady Shafto. "Helen, you were not with us in Rome when we met her. She is a most elegant woman and a very sensible one, too."

Lady Shafto has been a beauty, and gives herself airs on the strength of it; she is somewhat dictatorial, and rules Sir Felix with a firm hand.

"Very sensible, truly," remarks Sir Robert Caryl, laughing; "let me see, she threw over the man who was engaged to her for Sir Jasper, and ten thousand a year."

"Is that true?" demands Helen, "do tell us, Colonel."

"The story is that she was engaged to

some young fellow in her father's regiment, very agreeable, no doubt, but unfortunately with neither money nor prospects; and her father, dying in almost a state of bankruptcy, she gave up her engagement, on receiving proposals from Sir Jasper.

"I think she behaved disgracefully," exclaims Evelyn, with indignation, "and you know you agree with me, Guardy, so you need not put on that extremely virtuous air."

The Colonel smiles at her in spite of himself.

"I should think she must be sorry enough by this time," interrupts Jack Beresford, "I knew something about Sir Jasper; he was mixed up in an affair at Malta, not at all to his credit, and had the reputation of being the vilest temper, and the biggest bully in the service."

"Then he was in the army?"

"Yes, for a year or so."

"And what became of her first lover?" enquires Helen.

Jack laughs. "History does not relate, but I believe he exchanged into a regiment ordered on foreign service. He was a good fellow; but it must be quite six years since I saw him last. His name was Carew. By the way, Ray, what does Sir Robert think of our regiment going abroad? I suppose it will be India," he continues, turning to Vandeleur, who is deeply engaged in an evidently highly-interesting conversation in undertones with Miss Shafto.

"Hush! do not say anything more now, Jack, Sir Robert is rather cut up about it," replies Ray, hastily.

"When do you go out?" asks Colonel Vyvyan, in a low voice.

"In November, I believe; my uncle wants me to exchange, but I don't care to. I should like a year out there."

He glances at Helen, as he speaks, and notices how pale she is. She toys nervously with a peach, and her hand trembles in spite of all her efforts at self-control.

"If the Redgraves arrive in time, do you not think we might ask them to our picnic," says Mrs. Welbrook, the wife of the county member and the mother of the two blooming girls seated at the other end of the table.

"Certainly," rejoins Lady Shafto, "we want another couple."

"What do you say to a dance at the Priory in the evening?" asks the Colonel; "I mentioned it to Mrs. Campbell this morning, and she thinks it would be a nice ending to the day's pleasure."

"Oh! how wicked of you to keep such a charming arrangement from me," laughs Evelyn, shaking her fan at him; "if it were not so delightful, I declare I would not let you go to the picnic at all."

"What a tyrant you are," says Helen, smiling. At this moment the ladies rise, and, as Ray draws back Helen's chair, he whispers, "I will join you on the terrace directly." She evinces no surprise, only her eyes droop, and a soft flush steals over

her face, as, gathering up her gloves and fan she follows in the rear of her mother.

* * * * * *

The moon has risen, and bathes the landscape with silver radiance; the evening air, heavy with the odour of clematis and late roses, lifts the curls from Helen's brow as she leans over the parapet of the terrace.

Within, the lamps are lit, and Evelyn is turning over the albums with Miss Welbrook, whilst the dowagers are seated at some distance discussing an evidently interesting topic, to judge from their animated appearance.

Helen's arms rest upon the broad sill, and gleam like ivory in the moon-light. Presently, her heart beats loudly, as a quick, firm step sounds along the flags, and in another instant Raymond Vandeleur is beside her.

He takes her hand, and drawing her into the deep embrasure of the study window, folds her in his arms in a long and tender embrace.

"My darling," he murmurs, "how glad I am to see you again! Do you know it is two whole months since we met? Are you quite sure you have not forgotten me, or had you time to bestow a thought upon your absent lover now and then amidst all your gaiety?"

He holds her a little away from him, and looks into her laughing face with a smile.

She shakes her head;

"How could you expect me to think of you, when you positively refused to come and look after me?"

"I hear you have perpetrated all kinds of mischief, completety bowling over the great match of the season at your first drawing room, and thereby invoking the hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness of the remainder of the fair sex. I have a long catalogue of misdeeds against you, but I suppose I must spare you to-night."

"Oh, you silly boy! How can you talk such nonsense," she replies, with a gay laugh, patting his arm.

"And you have returned to me unchanged, Nell," he enquires, gently, "you still love me the same?"

He gazes eagerly into the fair face so near his own, and reads his answer in the soft depths of the upturned violet eyes. He does not speak, only his arms hold her a trifle closer.

"Can you manage to come out to-morrow morning?" he asks, after a moment's pause, "I have so much to say to you; we might do a little fishing."

"To be sure, our fishing is generally so very successful, is it not?" she says, archly; "however, I should enjoy the river immensely, only please do not try to drown me, as you did the last time we went. Do you not think we had better bring Philip with us to help to take care of me," looking up at him with a mischievous smile curling her red lips.

"Hang Philip!" is his reply, with assumed impatience.

"There! do not be cross," soothingly,

laying a soft little hand on his mouth, "and if you are a good boy, you shall bring the punt to the foot of our lawn at eleven o'clock, and I will try not to keep you waiting more than half-an-hour or so; and now we must really return to the drawing-room, or my lady will give me an hour's lecture to-night on the extreme impropriety of my conduct," and Helen draws herself up to her full height, and imitates her mother's voice to the life.

Ray laughs, and holding her face in his two hands kisses her gently, then runs down the steps into the garden, saying:

"You go to the drawing-room, Nell. I must look into the stables and see if my horses are all right."

So Helen slips in, unobserved by anyone save Philip Caryl, under cover of a song by Miss Welbrook. She finds Jack Beresford still hovering about Evelyn Carisford, and seats herself in a low velvet chair near them, where she is presently joined by Ray.

The latter is much amused at Beresford's evident state of spooneyness, as hitherto Jack has rather prided himself on the dexterity with which he has eluded all the attacks made upon his heart, but Miss Carisford has proved too much for him.

CHAPTER III.

SHAFTO COURT.

SIR FELIX SHAFTO was one of the leading men in the county.

He entertained in a princely manner, kept notable hunters for himself and his friends, had a snug shooting-box in the Highlands, and a house in town, and was to all outward appearance a very wealthy man, and Helen, being the only child, was a prospective heiress.

Only he and Lady Shafto knew exactly where the shoe pinched. At present, in spite of his reputed riches, they were both agreed that Helen must make a good match.

Raymond Vandeleur and Philip Caryl had been Helen's playmates from childhood, and Ray's boyish heart had been hers ever

since he had found her, a tiny little maiden, crying over a dead bird, which Philip had shot with his catapult.

The latter had laughed at her tears, but Ray, having placed the deceased songster in a card-board box, and buried it with great solemnity in the garden, had won her undying gratitude and devotion.

At the conclusion of the mournful ceremony, she had thrown her arms round his neck, and rewarded him with a kiss, and all the chivalrous love of his heart had been awakened at the touch of those soft little lips.

Lately, their childish attachment had lapsed into something much warmer, and Ray sometimes feared that his cousin Philip was not altogether impervious to Miss Shafto's beauty and attractions. Lady Shafto could scarcely help perceiving the attachment which existed between Helen and Raymond, a state of affairs which gave her great satisfaction, as she believed that Monks-Hollow would one day be his, and

therefore looked upon him as a most eligible *parti.*

So she let matters take their course, and quite ignored the meetings which occurred somewhat frequently between the lovers, whenever Ray was home on leave.

* * * * * *

"What a hot day!" exclaimed Helen Shafto, as she reclined upon the cushions in the punt, whilst Ray slowly propelled it down the stream.

He looked fresh and cool in a suit of white flannels, with a straw hat set rather at the back of his head, just showing the crisply-curling ends of his brown hair.

"How tired you will be, Ray, do you not find punting warm work?" continued she, glancing up at him with such admiring eyes, that he turned towards her with a smile, and said:

"When you have quite finished taking an inventory of either my deficiencies, or my charms, I shall really be grateful, as I am growing quite nervous."

"I was not aware you saw me," retorted Helen, with a warm blush, pulling her broad-brimmed hat over her eyes.

"I felt your gaze, Nell; you see there must be some wonderful magnetism in it."

"I think you talk a great deal of nonsense," pouting.

"You are in my power now, so I should advise you not to be impertinent," returned he, as he guided the punt into the shade of some low-spreading alders, which reared their fresh green heads on the river's brink.

Helen laughed, and settled herself more comfortably in her cushions.

The noonday sun was pouring down his fiercest rays, whilst the air scarcely stirred the yellow flags which grew tall and thick down to the water's edge.

Helen gazed dreamily over the buttercup studded meadow-land, where the sleek cows stood knee-deep in the cool soft grass, the birds sang their loudest, and the gnats hummed drowsily in the sunshine.

Having made fast the punt to a tree, Ray proceeded to arrange his fishing-tackle, which task being accomplished to his satisfaction, he seated himself beside his fair companion, saying:

"You look remarkably well this morning, Miss Shafto, and that dark blue gown becomes you extremely. Really, London has not done you much harm after all," and he gently inserts an arm round her slender waist.

She laughs, and dabbling her hands in the clear water, pulls up sprays of the blue forget-me-nots which gaze at her with their innocent baby eyes.

He imprisons one of the wet white hands, and covers it with kisses; presently she turns to him, and says timidly:

"Ray, why do you go away? Sir Robert cannot bear the idea of foreign service."

"Poor old boy! He remembers the time when my parents were lost, that is why he fears it so much."

"How terrible it would be if anything

should happen to him while you are abroad," continues Helen, nervously.

"Nell, you frighten me," anxiously; "surely you do not think he is ailing?"

"No, no, dear, only you should not forget that he is no longer young, and he seems so wrapped up in you. We shall all miss you so terribly, Ray;" her voice falters, and pausing abruptly, she turns her head away, and makes frantic endeavours to reach a white water-lily floating near on its broad green leaves.

He waits till it is captured, and then holding her closely clasped in his strong arm, says, in a low voice:

"I will do anything you bid me, Helen, but if I leave the service, and settle down here, I shall want some one to look after me; I shall want you, my darling," and he bends forward till his eager bronzed face is on a level with hers.

"Will you take me, Nell, or am I too bad a bargain?"

She shakes her head with a little laugh:

"I am afraid it is useless waiting for you to grow any better."

This reply seems eminently satisfactory to Ray, who exclaims:

"My child, how happy you make me!"

"Please to remember it is entirely for Sir Robert's sake," she continues archly, and then she looks up into her lover's radiant face, and their lips meet in one long kiss.

* * * * * *

Meanwhile Philip Caryl has passed the morning in no particularly amiable frame of mind.

First of all, he had found on the breakfast-table several unmistakable-looking envelopes addressed to himself, which had quite deprived him of his appetite.

Secondly, he discovered that his cousin had taken the punt on a fishing expedition, and he immediately suspected that he had not gone alone. It was a singular fact that the results of the fishing were generally

nil; if asked, Ray always declared he put the fish back in the river.

He lounged moodily about the stables for an hour, talking to the stud-groom, and then finding it too hot to remain any longer out of doors, took refuge in the billiard-room, where, after knocking the balls about for a time, he flung himself down in an arm-chair, with a paper and a cigar, and eventually fell into a doze.

The room was built out at the back of the house, and had six windows, which partly overlooked the flower-garden, and it so happened that one of the gardeners was at work under the window near which Philip was lying.

He was presently aroused by hearing a low-toned conversation outside, but was not sufficiently awake to pay much heed to it.

Shortly it became so exceedingly interesting from the introduction of his cousin's name, that he could not help listening.

"Ah!" said an unmistakably feminine voice, "don't tell me I can't see as far as

most people; and Mr. Ray won't find a prettier, nor a nicer young lady, if he goes all the world over. I know when a young gentleman's in love."

"Go along with you, do," returned a gruff voice, "you women are always muddling your brains with some nonsense or other. Why I shouldn't wonder if you begin to think I'm in love with you next"

"Well, John, perhaps I shouldn't be very far out," with a suppressed giggle; "now be quiet, do, John, you're rumpling my collar; at all events, you see if my words don't come true—one of these days, Miss Shafto will be mistress of Monks-Hollow."

"Hold your tongue, you idiot, suppose anyone should hear you; there's that Mr. Philip is somewhere about the grounds."

"Rubbish!" retorted the damsel in tones of deep disgust, "much I care for him and his black looks, he never gives as much as a smile, or a civil word to any of us. We might as well be the dirt under his feet, for he treats us as if we was; he's a nice well-

disposed young gentleman he is—it'd be a bad day for some of us, John, if ever he came into the property—but there I must go, or Mrs. Foster 'll be in a fine stew."

"Very pleasant, certainly," ejaculated Philip, sitting and peeping out behind the curtain; "ah! one of the housemaids, as I supposed; I shall not forget you, young lady," apostrophizing the now vanishing figure, "truly listeners never hear any good of themselves. So it is a settled thing, my charming abigail, that Miss Shafto is to be mistress of Monks-Hollow; so she shall, but not as Raymond's wife. There you make a little mistake, your ideas are somewhat premature. D——n him!" he burst out savagely, "is he to have everything flung at his feet—always the kernels and I the husks, while that old fool gratifies his slightest wish, and swears at me if I exceed my miserable allowance by even a 'pony.'"

So saying he flung open the door and strode out of the room and, crossing the

hall came upon Ray, who had just returned from the river, and looked radiant with happiness.

Catching sight of Philip's stormy countenance, he exclaimed. "Why, Phil, old man, what's up?—Nothing wrong I hope?"

"What the d—l can it matter to you?" was the amiable rejoinder.

Ray shrugged his shoulders; "Well, at least you might keep a civil tongne in your head," he returned, quietly.

"It's better policy to keep friends with him," thought Philip, so turning round, he held out his hand to his cousin, saying, "Don't mind me, Ray, the fact is, I am awfully bothered this morning."

"Indeed, what's the row?"

"Oh, the old story—those infernal bills," with a sigh.

"My dear fellow, I'm so sorry; by the way, I have a cool hundred in hand just now—if it's the least use to you pray take it."

"Thanks, Ray, you are very good, but I won't accept it yet; perhaps later on I may be glad of it."

"Just as you like, only I am afraid it won't last very long," replied Ray, with a laugh, as he shook his cousin's hand, and ran lightly up-stairs, whistling a popular air. Philip gazed after him with a frown, a strong, ungovernable feeling of rage and jealousy surging madly in his breast.

CHAPTER IV.

LADY REDGRAVE.

BEECH-HURST, just let to Sir Jasper Redgrave, was a picturesque, rambling old house, with broad lawns sloping down to the river, and shaded by ancient cedars. Its grey walls were covered by clustering masses of flowering creepers whose blossoms filled the air with perfume. The gardens were extensive, and there was some good shooting round the Upland farm, which had been the principal attraction to Sir Jasper.

An elegant victoria and pair of showy chestnuts stands in front of the hall-door, and Lady Shafto, and her daughter alight, and follow the footman through a cool spacious, oak-panelled hall, decorated with

valuable specimens of old blue and white china, and hung with trophies of sport from all lands. A splendid tiger-skin covers the centre of the floor, and the head of a monster bison hangs in a place of honour above the drawing-room door. From the open windows at the end may be seen glimpses of a velvety lawn, gay with flowers. The room into which they are ushered is long and low, fragrant with the perfume of heliotrope and roses, with Venetian sun-blinds giving a delicious sense of coolness and shade to the apartment, and a large conservatory at the side, where masses of gorgeous tropical plants bloom amongst the delicate fronds of rare ferns, and the refreshing splash of a small majolica fountain falls softly on the ear.

"What a charming house!" exclaims Helen, sinking into a lounging chair.

Lady Shafto makes no reply, she is busily engaged in examining the valuable water-colours on the walls, each a little gem of its kind, as are all the costly toys of

silver, ivory and china, heaped in priceless confusion on the velvet tables.

Whilst they are still admiring, the door opens, and Lady Redgrave enters.

"What a lovely woman!" is Helen's first thought, and, indeed, Sylvia Redgrave is well-deserving the title of a beauty.

She is about the middle-height, but looks taller from the somewhat haughty carriage of her small well-set head with its wealth of raven hair. Her features are faultless, and would be almost insipid in their perfect regularity, were it not for the deep, dark passionate eyes, whose black silken fringes sweep her creamy cheek. There are sensitive lines round the small curling mouth, and a wistfully, unutterably weary, sad, expression in those brown liquid eyes, that appeals at once to Helen's sympathy, as, their first greetings over, Lady Redgrave sank gracefully into a low chair, and commenced the usual chit-chat of the day.

"I am so pleased to make your acquain-

tance, Miss Shafto," she remarked, presently, turning to Helen. "I heard of you in town, though unable to be there myself, being detained in Paris through the illness of a friend of mine. I shall hope to see you very often. Of course you can ride?"

Helen eagerly assented.

"Ah, then there is one bond of sympathy between us. I hope you will sometimes let me be your companion."

"Indeed, Lady Redgrave, I shall be delighted; I hate riding alone, and papa seldom finds time to go with me now."

"It is so good of you to ask us to your picnic," said Lady Redgrave, as Lady Shafto rose, after a little time to take her leave, "Miss Carisford and the Colonel rode over yesterday to tell us about it, and we shall be delighted to come. The woods are so lovely, and I have been abroad for four years, so you can imagine how I appreciate an English summer." And then having made their adieux, Lady Shafto and

Helen, found themselves in their victoria, bowling out of the large gates.

Presently, Helen turned and looked at her mother, "You said there is a story attached to her—she looks it: either she is suffering from remorse, or she is unhappy in her marriage."

Lady Shafto laughed.

"My romantic Helen! I really did not notice anything of the kind. She seemed to me a most charming and elegant young woman. Pray do not make such extraordinary remarks to anyone else; I cannot imagine where you get your ideas from, Helen."

Helen did not reply, but she thought to herself, "I believe Sir Jasper is cruel to her, and I am sure I shall hate him."

CHAPTER V.

A TERRIBLE ADVENTURE.

"GOOD morning Guardy, here is a glorious day for the picnic," was Evelyn Carisford's greeting, as she entered the breakfast-room of the Priory.

Colonel Vyvyan leant out of the low window, and gathered a rose from the branches growing round the verandah. "Sweets to the sweet, Eva," said he, handing it to her, "it just matches your cheeks."

"Don't talk nonsense, Guardy," retorted Evelyn, with a faint blush, turning to kiss the Colonel's sister, Mrs. Campbell, who just then entered the room.

"I have been out of doors ever since seven o'clock, Auntie, gathering flowers to decorate the rooms for to-night," continued Evy.

"That accounts for the pink cheeks, I suppose," returned the Colonel, handing his sister her letters.

"You have a lovely day for the picnic, Roland," remarked Mrs. Campbell. "I have been thinking, it would be as well to leave me at home, and I shall be all the fresher for to-night."

"Oh, Auntie, I am so very disappointed!" exclaimed Evelyn.

"You will enjoy yourself quite as well without me, my dear," replied Mrs. Campbell, laughing; "I am afraid of one of my severe headaches."

"I think you are quite right, Mary, though I wish you could accompany us," said the Colonel, as he opened his "Times" and propped it up before him with the cruetstand.

He was a privileged person, and allowed to read during breakfast.

"A most unsociable habit," Evelyn declared, but one which the Colonel would not relinquish even for her, so she revenged

herself at times by hiding his paper, or by substituting an old one, much to his annoyance. However, this morning, he was permitted to peruse it in peace, whilst Evy chattered away to her heart's content, and finally bore Mrs. Campbell off for a tour of inspection through the different apartments, which bore witness to her artistic skill in decoration.

The Colonel was still deep in the perusal of his paper when his ward returned to the breakfast-room, and taking a low chair to the verandah, busied herself with the manufacture of some button-hole bouquets. Presently the flowers lay unheeded in her lap, as she lazily contemplated the Colonel's soldier-like figure in the arm-chair near the window.

The light, flickering through the rose-branches, fell upon the closely-cropped dark locks in which a few grey hairs were beginning to mingle, and showed up the proudly-cut aquiline profile.

As she sat looking at him, he suddenly

turned round, and said with a smile, that was almost hidden by his drooping black moustache.

"Pray what mischief are you meditating? You have been as still as a mouse for at least five minutes."

"Will you let me drive the pony-phaeton to the woods?" asked Miss Carisford, hurriedly, rather ashamed of being caught regarding him so fixedly.

"Of course you may; I will order it," he replied, and Evelyn, selecting the prettiest button-hole, laid it on the table beside him, and quitted the room.

The Colonel looked after her with fondly-admiring eyes, and took up the little bouquet to place it in his coat. He contemplated it for a second, and then hastily raised it to his lips, whilst a dusky flush rose to his cheek.

"Pshaw! what a fool I am getting!" he muttered to himself as he strode out of the apartment to give the necessary orders to the groom.

Miss Carisford's black ponies were not kept waiting that morning, for she appeared at the door as soon as they, looking wonderfully piquant and fresh, in a creamy linen costume, much ornamented with yellow lace and ribbons.

"Only one thing wanting, Evy," remarked the Colonel, as he handed her the reins, and then disappeared. Presently he returned with two or three half-opened "Marshal Neil" roses.

"There, child, fasten them in your brooch; they just match your dress."

The ponies tossed their heads, and sped swiftly along under the skilful guidance of their young mistress's light fingers, through shady lanes, where luxurious woodbines and starry clematis, flung their fragrant branches athwart the hedges, whilst a slight quivering mist rose from the valley, betokening a hot day.

After an hour's drive, they pulled up at a small inn, which was the rendezvous, and found most of the company already

arrived. Among them was Lady Redgrave, looking unusually bright and animated.

"You have not forgotten Sir Jasper, Colonel Vyvyan?" she said, as they shook hands, and he turned instantly to a slight, somewhat effeminate-looking man, standing beside her.

He was very fair and pale, with blonde hair, and moustache. The eyes were blue, and rather small, and had an unpleasant trick of never looking one straight in the face, whilst the corners of his well-cut mouth showed a considerable amount of temper.

However, he seemed in his best mood now, and cast admiring glances at Miss Carisford, much to Jack Beresford's disgust as that young gentleman had been devoutly hoping for the enviable post of cavalier to Miss Carisford for the day.

Fortunately, however, for Jack's peace of mind, the arrival of Sir Robert Caryl and his grandson created a diversion, and they all started off for the woods, now in the full glory of their summer beauty.

After a short walk under the shade of interlacing trees, upon the softest of moss carpets, they came upon an open glade, where the servants were already laying the luncheon.

Facing them was the noble pile of ruins of St. Gudule's Abbey, rising from a lofty cliff, towering high above the sea.

All was so still and peaceful, the only sound being the ripple of the waves as they beat against the sullen sides of the rocks. One could almost imagine they saw the train of brown-garbed, tonsured monks issuing from the iron gateway. Far away in the offing the sails of a yacht glistened in the sun like the wings of a sea-bird, and the crests of the waves sparkled like silver.

Evelyn drew a deep breath.

"Isn't it lovely?" she said to her devoted cavalier.

"It is indeed," he returned, but looking at her instead of the view.

A soft flush rose to her cheek, as she felt

rather than noticed his ardent gaze, and a gleam of mischief came into her brown eyes.

The luncheon was got through without any contretemps; the mustard-pot had not emptied itself into the cream, neither had the pepper and salt been forgotten. The champagne-cup was perfectly iced, and the salad declared perfection.

Sir Robert Caryl did not look quite himself to-day; Raymond, from his place next Miss Shafto, glanced at him occasionally, and felt rather uneasy about him. He seemed dull and *distrait*, and certainly not in his usual cheery mood.

After luncheon, the young people dispersed, some to explore the ruins, and others to ramble about the woods.

Raymond and Helen Shafto wandered away by themselves, and presently sat down under the broad green banners of a giant chestnut.

"Well, I am going to storm the fortress to-morrow," said he, smiling."

"What do you mean, Ray?" replied she, looking astonished.

"At twelve o'clock precisely I shall ride up to the hall-door of Shafto Court, demand an interview with Sir Felix, and boldly inform him that I seek his fair daughter in marriage, and if he refuses his consent, shall straightway carry you off, whether you like it or not."

"You terrify me," said Helen, laughing.

"Seriously though, I hope it will be all right," continued Ray, pressing his lips to the little hand he held.

"Of course it will," replied she, confidently; "and what shall you do about India, Ray?"

"Retire, my darling. Nothing shall induce me to leave you now. Ah, how happy I am! how unworthy of such a priceless treasure!"—clasping her to him with sudden passion. "Child," and the earnest face grows a trifle pale, "if you were to be untrue to me now it would be my death."

"Do not speak of it, dear, such a thing is impossible; you know how dear you are to me."

* * * * * *

Meanwhile Miss Carisford and Jack Beresford had wandered through the woods for some distance, and at last quite tired out, Evelyn threw herself down on a mossy bank bordering a small stream.

"What a pity pleasant things don't last longer," remarked Jack, lying back on the soft grass with his hat tilted over his nose and casting tender glances at his companion's fair face under her large crimson sunshade; "I should like to-day to spin itself out to three days."

"Perhaps I might not agree to that arrangement," replied Evelyn, demurely.

"You always say something cruel, Miss Carisford, which quite checks my exuberant spirits."

"Really, I have not noticed that my remarks have that effect, as a rule, Mr.

Beresford," returned she, calmly, gazing at the cows in the water.

"Ah, you won't have me much longer to chaff so cruelly," with a deep sigh.

"Nonsense, four months is an age; one may get dreadfully tired of a person in less than that," with a mischievous smile curliug the corners of her pretty mouth.

"And one may get madly, desperately in love in less time too, Miss Carisford," returned Jack, seizing the hand nearest to him.

Miss Carisford looked round at him with surprised brown eyes.

"Are you going to tell me my fortune, Mr. Beresford?"

"Yes, yes," replied Jack, turning red. and looking rather foolish. The hand lying in his strong brown palm was a very pretty one, white and slim, with dear littlc dimples at wrist and knuckles; it was too much for Jack's composure, and, after a moment's hesitation, he raised it to his lips and kissed it passionately. Evelyn with-

drew it angrily, and was proceeding to administer a severe reprimand to her devoted admirer, when a tremendous bellow made them jump hastily to their feet, and, looking round, they saw an enormous black bullock charging down upon them.

"It's all that crimson sunshade," exclaimed Jack, in rather forcible language.

About two yards from them was a good-sized stepping-stone, and near it a large rock covered with trailing water-plants. Jack seized the offending sunshade, which had probably attracted the brute, and hurled it to some distance, which fortunately distracted the animal's attention; then giving one bound which landed him safely on the stepping-stone, he turned to Evelyn, who stood pale with fright and almost paralyzed on the bank, exclaiming, "Make haste and jump, Miss Carisford, I will catch you. For God's sake look sharp, the brute will be on you in another second."

Evelyn needed no further bidding, and

in another instant was standing breathless but safe by Jack's side; only just in time, for the enemy's horns were within a yard of the skirt of her dress.

The bull, baulked of his prey, rushed madly up and down the bank, rolling his wicked little red eyes.

"This is pleasant, certainly," said Evelyn seating herself as comfortably as space would permit, on the rock; "suppose anyone should come this way, don't we look foolish?"

"Not a bit of it," answered Jack, laughing, "of course if you prefer to be gored, we will return to the bank, it is just as you please, I am quite at your service."

"Well, perhaps this is better," said Evelyn, beginning to laugh, as the absurdity of the situation struck her.

"I was so terrified, I really thought for the moment that you had basely run away, and left me to my fate."

"Oh dear!" sighed Jack, "this is the

unkindest cut of all. Miss Carisford, you have insulted me deeply."

Miss Carisford laughed till the echoes rang, and at last Jack couldn't look dignified any longer and joined her.

When they had laughed till they were out of breath, Jack said, "I feel like the young man in the story book; who said,

> "'How, shall I flee this horrible cow?
> I will sit on this stile and continue to smile,
> Which will soften the heart of the cow.'"

"Sit on this stone, and continue to moan," would be much more appropriate," retorted Evelyn.

"Miss Carisford, you are quite a poetess."

"Good gracious! there's the tea-bell; what will become of us!" exclaimed Evelyn, starting up, "see the bell has gone —do you not think we might return with safety?"

"Let me go first and reconnoitre," replied Jack, swinging himself on to the bank by a branch. He found the crimson sun-shade

dreadfully crushed and rent, and held it up for Evelyn's inspection.

Just at that moment she gave a cry, and Jack saw the head of the enemy appear from behind a clump of trees. There was nothing for it but to turn and run, which he did, closely pursued by his tormentor.

"What shall we do?" sighed Evelyn, in sore distress.

"We must make up our minds to spend the night here, I'm afraid," replied Jack, gravely.

"What, here, on this rock? Never!" exclaimed Evelyn, crimson with indignation.

"Can your charming Highness deign to propose anything better," asked Jack, innocently.

Evelyn's mouth quivered, and her eyes filled with something like tears, at the sight of which Jack's heart was touched.

"I am a brute," he exclaimed, "to tease you, if you don't mind looking at the opposite bank for one minute I shall be glad."

In an instant he slipped into the water, and looking down, Evelyn saw he had rolled up his trousers above his ankles, and his feet were bare.

"What are you going to do;" she asked, with some trepidation.

"I am going to carry you across," returned he, looking rather nervous.

"Oh, indeed, I could not."

"Nonsense, my dear child," said Jack, growing quite paternal in his manner, as his companion's increased in uneasiness.

"We cannot return as we came, and there is no other way of getting back, so pray say no more about it, but get up, and let me take you across."

Something in the firm tones prevented Evelyn from making any further demur; she stood up, and Jack took her gently in his arms, and waded carefully in the stream. Just as they were half way across, a shout of laughter from the bank reached them, and, looking up, Evelyn

saw, to her horror, the Colonel, Raymond Vandeleur, Helen, and several others.

"Keep still, for Heaven's sake! or I shall drop you," said Jack, anxiously. "You are not very big, Miss Carisford, but you weigh rather more than I fancied."

"Don't make fun of me," replied Evy, nearly crying, "I never felt so foolish in my life."

In another minute she was safely deposited on the bank, giving a graphic account of her adventures to an inquisitive audience.

As Jack resumed his shoes and socks, Ray said, with a laugh:

"I suppose there really was a bull, Jack——?"

"Sir, do you doubt the word of a gentleman?" replied Jack in tragic tones; "indeed there was a bull, and a very fine fellow too; I should like to buy him, he should live in clover for the rest of his life."

Ray laughed heartily. "How I wish

you could have seen yourself as we saw you holding Miss Carisford in your arms in the middle of the river. It was too ridiculous. For the moment, I really thought you were contemplating murder and suicide; the Colonel was quite shocked," and Ray laughed again till his sides ached.

"Look here, Ray, I shall get downright savage directly," said Jack, rather angry.

"Never mind, old man, you shall tell me all about it as we walk back to the others. Here, take a cigar, and I daresay a brandy and soda won't be amiss, after your stupendous exertions."

Jack laughed. "Certainly, I feel rather dry."

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER SUNSHINE, STORM.

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps
Upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the
Sounds of music
Creep in our ears."

SO quotes Jack Beresford, as he steps out of the ball-room into the verandah with Lady Redgrave.

Within, all is mirth, music, and light; the strains of Strauss's inspiriting valses gush in a flood of sensuous melody through the open windows of the Priory. Outside, the moon sheds her tender light on hill and valley. A solemn stillness reigns around.

The trees cast dark shadows on the velvet lawn, and the flowers raise their weary heads, and drink thirstily of the falling dew.

A thousand fragrant odours fill the night air, and a nightingale from a distant bush warbles his sweetest song.

"I am quite tired, Mr. Beresford," says Lady Redgrave, and sinks into a low chair, whilst Jack seats himself on the stone steps beside her.

She has just told him that he dances to perfection, so he feels rather pleased with himself.

He looks at her with admiring eyes, as she lies back in her chair in the shade of a branch of yellow roses, her delicate profile looking like ivory in the moon-light.

"I think we must have met before. I seem to have a faint recollection of your face, Mr. Beresford," she continues enquiringly.

"I met you several times before you were married, Lady Redgrave, at Malta," answers Jack, somewhat nervously.

A deep flush dyes her cheek, as she repeats in an undertone, "At Malta?"

"Yes, at Malta. I was then in the —th."

He looks at her, and she turns her large dark eyes upon him with startled eagerness.

"Is it possibe! Then you knew George Carew?"

There is a perceptible tremble in her voice as she speaks, and the slender white hands lying in her lap clasp themselves nervously.

"He was a great ally of mine, though several years my senior, but I have lost sight of him lately. You know he went to India; he will soon be in England again, as I see the —th are ordered home."

The colour fades away from Lady Redgrave's cheek, and a fixed look, in which despair and misery are blent, comes into her eyes; she gives a slight shiver, and rising, exclaims:

"I am getting quite chilly, let us go in."

* * * * * *

"Good-night, my darling," whispers Raymond Vandeleur to Helen, as he folds her in a brief embrace, in the garden before they part. "Look out for me to-morrow

morning, I shall want a little encouragement you know, before entering the lion's den."

"I do believe you are getting nervous, Ray," returns Nell, laughing; "banish all idle fears, and make up your mind for success. Papa will be glad to get rid of me, I am a dreadful nuisance to them sometimes."

Helen nestles her head on her lover's shoulder, as she speaks, and the curling ends of his brown moustache touch her soft cheek for an instant.

Presently she continues:

"I am afraid you will find me dreadfully selfish and thoughtless, Ray; it is not yet too late to alter your mind, you know—" she breaks off abruptly, almost frightened at the vehemence with which her lover exclaims:

"Don't talk like that, I can't bear it. Do you know that this is a matter of life and death to me. Nell, I often think that perhaps things are going on too smoothly

with us; it makes me anxious, I am much too happy."

Helen looks grave.

"I am sure it will all be right to-morrow, Ray, and you know if we love each other nothing can, nor shall, separate us."

"God bless you for that speech, Nell. I hope for the best, but somehow to-night, I feel horribly down on my luck. Give me one little kiss, my pet, and then I must go, or Sir Robert will be waiting."

A soft arm steals round his neck, and a trembling little mouth is pressed to his for an instant, and then they proceed to the hall, where everyone is busy making their adieux. Raymond is to drive Sir Robert in his T-cart.

The Colonel accompanies his guests to the hall door, and sees them safely into their respective chariots.

"Have a cigar, Ray," he says, handing his cigar case to the young man, as he gets into an over-coat.

"Thanks, I will."

He proceeds to light it as Sir Robert takes his seat. The high-stepping bay, Ray's latest acquisition in the shape of horseflesh, paws the gravel, and tosses his head impatiently.

Ray takes the reins, and swings himself lightly into his seat, with a pleasant "Good-night, Colonel; thanks for a most delightful evening," and away they go along the fragrant lanes, ripe with the scent of honeysuckle and meadow sweet.

"Ray," says Sir Robert, presently, when the bay has settled down into a long steady trot, "is there anything—anything—" hesitating — "between you and Helen Shafto?"

"Yes, uncle, I have asked her to be my wife, and to-morrow I am to see Sir Felix. Strangely enough, I intended to tell you all about it to-night. Hope you have no objection, sir!"

"My dear boy, I am very glad—very glad. I am getting old, Ray, and I should like Monks-Hollow to have a mistress

again before the old man departs," says Sir Robert, in somewhat tremulous accents.

"Don't, uncle," and Ray gives a most unnecessary cut with the whip to his bay, while something very like a tear twinkles for an instant on his eye-lash.

"Why, you are quite a young'un yet, and take the shine out of a good many of us," and so saying, he lays his hand on his uncle's with a tender pressure.

They have reached the park-gates now, and go along the chestnut avenue at a quick trot, then Ray throws his reins to the groom and assists Sir Robert to alight.

They stand for an instant on the steps, "What a heavenly night!" remarks the baronet, gazing earnestly over the wooded expanse of hill and dale.

"You look so tired, sir, don't you think you had better go in?" says his nephew, anxiously.

"I am in no hurry, my boy," and Sir Robert seats himself upon the stone balustrade.

After a moment's silence, he lays his hand upon his nephew's arm and says earnestly:

"Remember, Ray, it is all yours, all yours," and then he turns away and goes upstairs with his valet.

Raymond did not accompany him, he waited outside to finish his cigar, and wondered what could make him feel so perturbed and uneasy.

He thought it scarcely possible that Sir Felix Shafto would say "No" to his suit, and yet an indefinable sense of impending misfortune hung over him in spite of all his efforts to shake it off. After several turns up and down the terrace, he went inside, and ordering a soda and B., proceeded to change his coat before settling down to a chat and a cigar with his cousin and Jack Beresford.

As he passed his uncle's room Bates, the valet rushed hastily out, pale with fright, exclaiming:

"For God's sake, sir, come in, Sir Robert's in a fit!"

With a feeling of extremest horror Raymond ran into the room, and found his uncle lying senseless on the floor in the rigid grasp of that dire enemy, paralysis.

CHAPTER VII.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

THE morning came, and found Raymond a pale and anxious watcher beside Sir Robert's bedside.

The house wore a hushed aspect, the servants crept about as if fearing to disturb their master, who lay impervious alike to sound or sight. Raymond had telegraphed to London with all haste for an eminent doctor, who duly arrived, and held a prolonged consultation with the country practitioner.

He thought Sir Robert might rally, but it was improbable, sohe informed Ray and Philip; and after partaking of a particularly good luncheon, and a bottle of old madeira, pocketed his handsome fee, and departed, saying he would come again in

a day or two, but knowing that nothing would ever bring back life and vitality to poor Sir Robert's stricken frame.

Mrs. Foster was unwearied in her attendance upon her beloved master.

Dr. Jarvis had suggested the assistance of a nurse.

"No thank you, sir," replied Mrs. Foster, "I've been with Sir Robert nigh on forty year, and I'll not desert him now."

So Mrs. Foster reigned supreme, with Bates, Sir Robert's own man, in attendance.

Philip Caryl at this time was very thoughtful and kind; he seemed to have shaken off all his gloomy, morose manner, and would often sit for an hour at his grandfather's bed-side, whilst the others rested.

Meanwhile Helen Shafto was feeling very unhappy. She was deeply attached to Sir Robert, and her grief at his sudden illness was excessive.

Of course Ray made no attempt to see

Sir Felix, he had no time to think of it. He wrote tender little notes to Helen every day, and managed to run up to Shafto Court once in the evening for an hour to see her, but they both felt that nothing could be said to Sir Felix at present. On the evening that Ray went to Shafto Court, Philip easily prevailed upon Mrs. Foster and Bates to leave their patient in his charge for a time.

Mrs. Foster was longing for a breath of fresh air, for it was a hot, sultry evening, and Bates was hoping to enjoy a pipe in the stables. So, nothing loth, they departed, mentally blessing Philip. He watched them cautiously down the broad oak stairs, until the baize door, leading into the servants' offices, shut them from his sight, and then he returned to the room.

Taking up a book he settled himself in an arm-chair by the window, but not to read. His eyes roved over the vast acres spreading on either side, on waving corn-fields, and green woods. He pushed the

thick dark hair from his brow with hot, tremulous hands, and muttered:

"Good God! this suspense will kill me. I must risk it, come what may."

He left his chair and approached the bed. "Suppose he should die now," and he gazed down upon the silent figure with something of remorse for the bitter feeling raging in his heart. For a moment his dark face softened, as he looked at the poor, faded, pinched countenance lying on the pillow, but the emotion was but momentary.

"You were cruel to my father and mother, now it is my turn," he whispered, and, as he spoke, a flood of memories came over him.

He thought of how many years Sir Robert had been to him as a kind father, indulgent, generous and open-handed. He thought of the many times he had exceeded his liberal allowance, of the bills that Sir Robert had paid with scarcely a murmur, of the ponies and horses, guns and dogs he had bestowed on him, and then he remembered that he was the heir,

and yet obliged to give precedence to Raymond; and this last thought, which had embittered all his life, and was the canker eating into his very soul, swept away all his good feelings, and, with a muttered imprecation, he hastily crossed the room to his grandfather's dressing-case, and took out his keys. With one of them he opened a secretary standing in a recess in the wall.

It was full of papers, and after a moment's search he pulled out a drawer at the back, and took from it a peculiar looking key, which he put in his pocket.

"I must risk it to-night or it may be too late. Another week of this awful suspense would be the death of me."

He replaced the keys in the dressing-case, and re-seated himself by the window just in time, as Mrs. Foster entered almost immediately.

"Sir Robert hasn't moved, I suppose, sir," she enquired.

"No."

"You look warm, sir," continued she; "don't stay in this room, it's dull for you; why don't you go for a ride, sir, you've been in-doors so much lately."

"Has Mr. Raymond come in yet?" asked Philip, with restless eagerness.

"Not yet, sir, we don't expect him home till late when he goes to Shafto Court," said the old woman, with a smile.

Philip smothered an oath and strode out of the room, much to Mrs. Foster's astonishment.

"Dear, dear, what a hot-tempered young gentleman he is, to be sure! so different from Master Ray, bless him."

"Garrulous old fool," exclaimed Philip, as he ran downstairs, "I should like to wring her neck. I suppose my precious cousin is making love to Miss Helen. I wonder how long that will last. *Tout vient à lui qui sait attendre*, it seems to me that I have waited long enough."

With a bitter laugh he seized his hat and hurried out into the garden.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EVENTFUL NIGHT.

THE picture-gallery at Monks-Hollow lay between Sir Robert's apartment and the rooms occupied by Philip and Ray, which were on either side of a long corridor, at the end of which, shut off by double doors, was a strong-room, burglar and fire-proof, built in the wall.

Sir Robert had had a legal training, and loved parchment from his youth, and kept deeds and papers of all kinds in this room, much to the disgust of his lawyer, who strongly disapproved of such very unbusiness-like ways.

After Ray returned from Shafto Court, he offered to sit up with Sir Robert; and Philip retired early to his own rooms, which consisted of a spacious bed and

dressing-room adjoining, and a kind of study or "den," where he kept his books, papers, etc.

A splendid tiger-skin rug lay before the hearth, the gift of a friend and quondam school-fellow, now in India.

Pipes of all kinds littered the mantel-shelf, in the centre of which stood an exquisite Barbèdienne bronze, and in a recess near the window, partly veiled by a crimson velvet curtain, was a perfect copy of the Venus de Medici. There was an old fashioned ebony cabinet in a corner of the room, curiously inlaid with brass, which had belonged to a by-gone Lady Caryl, in the reign of the first George. —a curious old piece of furniture, which would have raised envy and covetousness in the breast of a Wardour Street connoisseur.

Philip, in his dressing-gown and slippers, sat by the window, smoking.

Twelve o'clock struck, one o'clock struck, still he sat motionless, but at half-past one,

he rose and opening his door, crept slowly and cautiously along the corridor to the top of the staircase, and listened.

Not a sound could be heard.

He opened the door of the picture-gallery and walked stealthily along.

The moonlight quivered through the tall windows, and glanced on the portraits of the Caryls, hanging on the walls.

He scarcely dared to look at them.

There was one picture of a dare-devil Philip of days long ago, which had always had a fearful fascination for him. He had listened to many tales of this man's sin and wickedness, stories told by Mrs. Foster, in the twilight of winter evenings, which had made his blood run cold. As he passed it, something compelled him to pause. It seemed as if the figure smiled, and the eyes gazed into his with a mocking gleam in their fierce depths.

Unable to bear the sight, he turned, and hurried out of the gallery—once outside, he breathed a sigh of deep relief, and

wiped away the drops of perspiration which stood thick upon his brow, then he crept noiselessly to the door of Sir Robert's room.

It was shut, and silence reigned within.

He retraced his steps swiftly, and striking a light, went towards the strong-room. Taking a key from his pocket, he inserted it into the wall, and slowly the ponderous iron door rolled back upon its hinges.

Philip cast a hasty glance and entered.

After some time, he emerged holding a roll of parchment. He carefully locked the door, extinguished the light, and stole back to his room.

Carefully he bolted his door, and going to a buffet seized a decanter of brandy, and emptied part of it into a tumbler, and drank it off at a draught.

"Thank God I have found it! I would not go through such another hour for half the property. And yet it is worth a little trouble."

He threw open the window to its widest extent, and leant out.

The moon had grown coy, and partially covered her glory with a soft fleecy veil; in the horizon, piles of black clouds lay sleeping, but with the restlessness of a volcano, for ever and anon flashes of lightning shot out from their sombre masses. The flowers hung their heads wearily, the ground was parched and thirsty, longing for the thrice blessed rain.

The sulphurous air gives Philip no relief, he gasps for breath. His brain feels on fire, he longs, craves, to know the contents of that parchment roll, and yet he dares not open it.

He takes another glass of brandy before he seats himself by the lamp, and with a painful effort unties the tape which binds it.

He pauses for a moment: that parchment will make or mar him, will convert him into a generous young squire, or a black-hearted devil; so he blinks as he begins to read.

The will commences with various bequests to friends, old servants, and others.

Philip merely glances at these; presently his hands tighten upon the parchment, and the veins swell angrily on his white forehead. When he has read it all, every word, he flings it to the further side of the room, and his head falls upon his outstretched arms, whilst one great bitter sob bursts from his heart.

And then the ungovernable fury which has been kept under so long breaks out, and he starts up and paces the room, whilst imprecations of the most dreadful kind fall from his white lips.

"It is as I thought, £20,000 to me, the heir, and the shooting box in Scotland; and everything else, horses, plate, jewels, pictures, and Monks-Hollow, to *him*. Oh, father, father, how are your sins visited upon your child," and then he throws himself down upon the sofa in a perfect paroxysm of rage and despair.

Presently, however, his fury dies out, and pale and exhausted, he picks up the offending document, and paces the room.

"What had I better do with this infernal thing? I suppose I must burn it. If I do, everything comes to me, and Raymond," here he laughs sardonically, "poor devil! he will only have the few hundreds left him by his father."

So he mused, until the clock struck three, and the storm came nearer and nearer, whilst heavy peals of thunder awoke the echoes.

The rain poured down in a hissing cataract, and the grateful earth gave forth her sweetest, freshest odour into the cooling air.

The faint gleams of light in the East brightened into a dull, grey morning, and Philip was just thinking of getting a little sleep, when a bell rang out loud and long, awaking the slumbering household.

He started to his feet, exclaiming, "My God, has it come so soon!"

Catching up the will, he pulled out the ebony cabinet, and thrust the parchment into a secret drawer at the back. Having

closed it, he pushed the cabinet with such violence that it fell into its place with a loud crash.

With an oath, he opened the door, and rushed down the corridor to Sir Robert's room.

* * * * * *

Meanwhile, Raymond sat in the invalid's room reading, until he began to feel so sleepy, that he laid down his book and approached the window. The room was warm, and he threw open the casement and let in the cool air.

The faint streaks of light in the East, showed him that his vigil was nearly ended.

He turned away, and stood by the bedside.

"Three o'clock! Just time for his medicine."

So gently raising Sir Robert's head, he poured some drops down his throat.

In a little while he knelt down beside the bed, and taking the nerveless hand which laid outside the coverlet, kissed it gently.

"Oh, uncle!" he said, what will be the end of this—will you ever recover?" and overcome with emotion, he buried his face in the pillow.

Sir Robert stirred slightly.

"Can it be," thought Ray, "that he understands," and he brought the lamp nearer the bed, and looked earnestly at his uncle.

Sir Robert's eyes were open, and returned Ray's gaze with a strange wistful expression.

"Uncle, do you know me?" Ray enquired, anxiously,

The sick man moved, and endeavoured to articulate. Ray bent down over him and listened, but no sound issued from Sir Robert's parted lips.

"Try to speak to me, uncle. I am Ray, your nephew," he pleaded in an agonized whisper, but in vain.

Presently the hand he held moved, and a faint "Ray," fell upon his ear, and then a grey wan shade crept over Sir Robert's

face; a change which struck a terrible chill through his nephew's frame.

As the light fell across the bed from the open casement, Sir Robert's eyes glanced out at the hills now misty with rain, a slight quiver passed over his sunken features, and with a faint pressure of the hand lying so closely clasped in his beloved Raymond's, Sir Robert Caryl's soul passed away to its eternal rest.

Ray seized the bell and pulled it vigorously, but when Mrs. Foster and Bates hurried in, alarmed at the summons, they found their young master lying across the body of his uncle, almost as cold and inanimate as the lifeless clay.

* * * * * *

An hour or two later Philip returned to his room to dress, during which proceeding he mentally determined to burn the will.

"I can do nothing else," he thought, "I was deuced lucky to be able to slip the key back again in the secretary, while old Foster was out of the room. Good Heaven!

it was a near thing, and makes me feel hot to think of it; the will must go— it is too late to restore it, and after all it is unjust, I am the heir, why should I be passed over?"

So musing he drew out the old cabinet once more, and touching the spring in the back, the door opened—but Philip's face grew white as death, and big drops started out upon his brow; "Good God! what is this?" he muttered, and frantically he dragged the cabinet further from the wall, and the light poured into the recess in which he had placed the parchment. *It was empty, the will was gone.*

CHAPTER IX.

TROUBLED WATERS.

"The course of true love never did run smooth."

"DIED without a will! Impossible!" exclaimed Helen Shafto; "it cannot be so—the will is mislaid," and she pushed away her chair from the writing-table, and gazed blankly at her mother.

"Monks-Hollow has been searched thoroughly, not a drawer, nor a cupboard overlooked, but there is no will."

"Then Philip Caryl——?" gasped Helen, breathlessly.

"Sir Philip Caryl inherits everything," replied Lady Shafto, continuing her crewel work after a rapid glance at her daughter's blanched countenance.

"And Raymond?" asked Helen, faintly.

"Raymond of course has nothing but his

father's money, about eight hundred or a little more a year, I believe. My dear Helen, pray do not look so horrified; you really ought to be most thankful that this has all been made known before his attentions assumed a more serious nature."

Helen made no reply, the room seemed spinning round her, everything looked black and misty, a feeling of physical numbness came over her, and her head sank back amongst the cushions of her chair.

She recovered herself almost immediately, however, and faltered:

"He has proposed to me."

Lady Shafto started.

"Why was I not informed of this?"

"He was coming to the Court the day after the picnic, to see you and papa, and then poor Sir Robert was taken ill and——"

Helen's voice broke, and her slender frame quivered with the sobs she could no longer restrain.

"Thank Heaven he did not come," thought Lady Shafto.

"And you accepted him, I suppose?" she enquired, with a sharp glance at her daughter's tearful face. "Well, whether you did or not makes little difference now; Raymond Vandeleur with Monks-Hollow and Raymond Vandeleur with nothing are two very different people. You will find he is much too sensible to wish to marry you under the present circumstances, unless he fancies you will have money."

"Oh mother, do not say that," implored Helen; "we are both young and can wait, only don't separate us."

"We will talk over this another time, my dear, when you are calmer," said my lady, rising; "but pray remember that though Raymond is a great favourite of ours, and in every way likely to make his wife happy, the idea of a girl with your advantages throwing yourself away upon him now, is perfectly ridiculous," so saying, my lady gathered up her work and quitted the room, leaving her unhappy daughter in a state of pitiable perplexity and misery.

"Break off our engagement!" she murmured, as she buried her face in her hands, and scalding tears forced their way through her slender fingers.

"Give up all thought of being his wife —and he so unhappy to—just when he needs all my love and sympathy to comfort him; is it possible that I could give him up because he is no longer rich? My darling, I love him a thousand times better!"

Just then a hand was laid on her shoulder, and looking up, she saw the loving little face of Evelyn Carisford, gazing at her with brown eyes full of tears.

She knelt down beside her and put her arm round her, saying:

"I know all you can tell me, Nell, and if I can help you in any way, I will do so. I have just seen Raymond, and he sends you this note, and you are to come back with me to the Priory for the evening."

"You're a darling, Eva," exclaimed Helen, seizing the letter she handed her; "but about mamma, what does she say?"

"I have settled it all; you run along and get your hat, for the ponies are very fresh to-day, and will not stand long."

"You have not seen Raymond since this terrible news came out, I suppose?" asked Evelyn, as they drove off.

"No; I knew nothing of it till this morning. Papa came home from Monks-Hollow last night, and though I asked him all sorts of questions, he would not tell me anything; he seemed dreadfully upset and depressed, but, of course, I thought it was the funeral and losing poor Sir Robert which made him so 'down,' but now I know it must have been this dreadful news. Oh, Evelyn! what shall we do, what will become of us?" she continued, clasping her hands. "If only I could see Ray for a few minutes; why does he not come to me?"

"Hush, dear, you will see him soon; don't worry, Nell, it will all come right. Now here we are, jump out, and go straight into my boudoir, and you will find something nice there," and, with a shy smile

which made Miss Carisford look so charming that it was a pity there was no one there to admire her, she threw the reins to her groom and disappeared down a side path into the garden.

Helen looked after her wondering what she meant, then she went in, and opened the door of Evelyn's special retreat; a tall well-knit form stood in front of the window, at the sight of which Nell's heart stood still. "Ray!" she exclaimed, and in another instant was clasped in her lover's arms.

For a moment he held her thus, heart to heart, then he put her a little away from him and looked down into her sweet face.

The tears stood thick upon her dark lashes, as she noticed how ill and haggard he had become. There were lines round his eyes telling of trouble and grief, and the brown cheek had lost its healthy colour; but Nell felt that she loved him far more in this hour of trial and sorrow

than she had ever done in the heyday of his prosperity and happiness.

"Come and sit here," he said, leading her to a low chair on the verandah, and seating himself on a stool at her feet.

"Do you remember I told you things were going too smoothly for us, Nell? I little thought into what rough water we were drifting. And, darling, I nave no right to claim you now," his voice broke for a second, but, with an effort, he continued, "Sir Felix will never consent to our marriage. God help me! I have lost uncle, property, friends and wife at one blow," and he turned away and buried his face in his hands.

You have both friends and wife, Ray. Trust me, dear. I will be true to you in spite of everything. When things are straighter, and you see your way more clearly you have only to come to me, and say, 'Are you ready, Nell?' and I will go with you wheresoever you will."

Nell spoke in a low, clear voice, and, as

Raymond turns and looks at her, a faint smile, like a watery gleam of April sunshine, illumines her pale face.

"You give me courage, darling, and I need it," is his reply, as he covers her hands with passionate kisses.

She is all that is left him; surely cruel fate will not rob him of his only treasure.

"And now, tell me your plans; I hear you have left Monks-Hollow," she says.

"Yes, never to return," he sighs heavily. "I have taken some rooms of Beresford's in town, and, Nell," he hesitates, "I—I—have applied to the Horse Guards for permission to depart as soon as possible to India."

"Oh, Ray," replies Helen, and her grasp tightens on his arm.

"Do not be angry with me, my darling, it is better for me to go, I can do nothing here," and, as he speaks, he draws the golden head gently down on to his shoulder, and, for a second, his bronzed cheek rests upon hers.

"How I wish I could go to," she sighs. "Men are so much better off than we, in trouble they can go away, and find relief in variety, and change of scene, but we poor women have to stay at home, and do nothing but think. Oh! it is so much more terrible; to have time to brood over one's troubles makes them appear much greater than they really are. The world will come to an end for me when you are gone. You are much more likely to forget than I."

The dark, grey eyes look into hers with a warm love-light in their depths, and then he draws from his pocket a half-hoop ring of five brilliants, which he places on her finger.

"This was my dear mother's ring, Nell. I should only give it to my wife."

CHAPTER X.

A LONG FAREWELL TO MONKS-HOLLOW.

FOR the last few days, the greatest excitement had prevailed at Monks-Hollow.

Sir Robert's lawyer had died some months previously, but his successor was positive that, some years before, Mr. Nesbitt had drawn up a will, and the butler and Bates both perfectly remembered that on one occasion of Mr Nesbitt's visit to Monks-Hollow, they had been called up into the study, and signed their names to a parchment. However, no will was forthcoming. All the papers were strictly examined in the strong-room and at the lawyer's offices in town, and Monks-Hollow was given over to the hands of the Philistines, otherwise detectives, and searched from top to

bottom—not a nook, or a corner, left untouched—but without success. Even the ebony cabinet came in for its share of examination, much to Philip Caryl's horror, for he was as puzzled as the rest of them, and being afraid of appearing backward in the search, had even offered £500 reward for the missing document.

Where it had gone he could not imagine.

After he had found it was no longer where he had placed it, in the cabinet, he had stood absolutely petrified with fear, unable to realize that it was gone.

"Was it possible that anyone could have seen him take it from the strong room, and afterwards stolen it?" he asked himself.

"But it was impossible; no one but himself knew of the secret recess, and certainly no one had seen him place it there."

Meanwhile he turned the old chest inside out, but without avail; the will had disappeared.

He was continually haunted by the fear of discovery, and the very sight of a

strange face among his many visitors, or a sudden peal of the door-bell, was sufficient to throw him into a tremor of vague horror and apprehension. One day, he had been unusually startled by the appearance of two strangers from town, who proved to be a detective and his colleague, come to make some further enquiries in the neighbourhood.

"I can't stand much more of this," he muttered, as he poured out a glass of brandy, and drank it off. "I shall shut up this place as soon as possible, and run over to Paris for a time."

He had begged Raymond to remain at Monks Hollow until his departure for India, and also offered him any necessary pecuniary assistance, but Ray had quietly and firmly declined both.

"No Philip," he said, "after what has passed, you and I must remain apart. That my uncle made no will, I cannot believe; there has been foul play somewhere, and until this mystery is cleared up, I will not

accept the smallest favour at your hands," and Ray's steel-grey eyes looked unflinchingly at his cousin's averted countenance.

"You are unjust," murmured the latter.

"Perhaps I may be, you know best whether I am or not," replied Ray, turning away.

"So, it is war to the knife," exclaimed Philip, as Ray left the room, "just as well perhaps, under the circumstances."

So, directly the funeral was over, and Philip installed as master of Monks-Hollow, Raymond made his arrangements for leaving, and Mrs. Foster and Bates packed up his things, the former sobbing bitterly the while.

"To think that I should ever live to see this day; oh, Mr. Ray what shall we do without you?" exclaimed the faithful old creature. "Me and Bates don't intend staying here now, we have saved a little money between us, and think of getting married; but never forget, sir, that you have two staunch friends in us, as would

lay down our very lives for you," and scalding tears ran down the old lady's withered cheeks.

"Come, come, old woman, this won't do," said Ray, feeling a choking sensation in his own throat, as he took her in his arms, and kissed her as he had done when a boy; "you must write to me sometimes, and let me know how you and Bates are getting on."

Before he left, he went to the picture gallery and looked at his mother's portrait. She was a lovely, stately woman, in a trailing satin gown, and pearls round her full white throat.

"When shall I see you again, mother," he murmured, as he gazed into those deep grey eyes, so like his own, through a mist of blinding tears.

And then, with one last look at the dear familiar objects of his youth, amongst the farewells of the weeping servants, he turned away from his home, and entered the fly which was to convey him to the Priory,

where Colonel Vyvyan had offered him a domicile for a few days.

"Much they would have regretted me," muttered Philip, as he watched his departure from his study window, with a gloomy frown. "Thank God he's gone, and now I must soon go also, for this place will kill me in another month."

CHAPTER XI.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

LADY REDGRAVE sat in her morning-room with a very troubled expression on her handsome face, as she slowly perused a letter bearing the Naples postmark. How many times that morning had she not read one paragraph, which ran thus :

"We are having a most delightful time here, and I have met several old friends, among them George Carew, who has just left the army on obtaining his majority. He tells me he intends returning to England directly, having received an invitation from his cousin, Bertie Hamlyn, who, it seems, has a very charming little place in your neighbourhood. I told him you were living in Devonshire, and he said he hoped to see you again."

"How unfortunate!" she said to herself, as she let the letter fall into her lap. "I hoped we might never meet again. Far better that we never should; the old memories are too dangerous to be dwelt upon, and the very mention of his name, brings them back with renewed force. "Ah me! can it be seven years ago, that sweet springtime when we loved one another."

Just at this moment, a sweet, bird-like voice was heard at the door requesting admittance, and presently there entered a tiny boy, who rushed into his mother's arms and proceeded to hug her violently, and clamour for "goodies."

Following him, came Sir Jasper, who looked flushed and hot, and threw himself in an arm-chair, saying, "I am nearly dead, have been exercising the bay colt in the meadow with Dixon. What a lot of letters you have; is there any news?"

"Yes, a long epistle from Mary Newman: they are staying at Naples—would you like to read it?"

Accordingly Sir Jasper perused it, and a smile dawned upon his face as he handed it back to his wife. "Ah, Carew—yes, I remember, rather a good sort of fellow, but terribly jealous of me; however, I bear him no malice. I must call on Hamlyn, and ask them over to dinner. He has some good shooting at Kirkham—might as well do the civil," and then Sir Jasper laughed softly, which laugh brought a bright flush to Lady Redgrave's cheek, and made her wince, as no angry words would have done.

"Helen Shafto is coming here to luncheon," she said, abruptly changing the subject, "she is so dull at home now, and I have taken such a fancy to her—she is so lovely."

"Bad business that about the will—looks uncommonly fishy to my mind.

"Pretty girl, Miss Shafto—no nonsense about her, and rides like——" here Sir Jasper's ideas failed him, and he contented himself with screwing up his mouth and

giving a prolonged whistle, much to his small son's delight.

"Must show her the bay colt—she is sure to understand horseflesh. By-the-bye, have you written to the Beresfords, asking them here for the 1st?"

At this moment a servant entered, and announced Miss Shafto, who came in, looking very lovely, and thereby arousing all Sir Jasper's admiration.

This gentleman had a great idea of his own fascinations, and like a good many more of his sex, thought himself a lady-killer.

"You will sit down and rest a little before taking off your things, won't you?" said Lady Redgrave, as she shook hands with her visitor. "Have you walked over, you look warm?"

"Yes, I thought a walk would do me good—it is such a perfect morning," replied Helen as she seated herself by the window, and drew little Wilfred Redgrave on her knee.

"What a darling!" she remarked, as the boy looked up at her with a pair of dark wistful eyes like his mother's.

He was tall for his size and slender, with soft fair golden locks curling round his delicate oval face.

"What is your name?" she asked, as she kissed him.

He did not answer her at once, but gazed at her with his large eyes, then apparently satisfied with the scrutiny, he put one arm round her neck, and pressed his lips to her cheek, saying, "I like you, you're pretty, like mamma."

They all laughed, and Lady Redgrave said, half-apologetically:

"You must not mind what he says, he is such a strange child, and being the only one gets dreadfully spoilt."

"Now tell me your name?" asked Helen, patting his curly head.

"It is too long to say, but I call myself Flo, like the little boy nurse tells me of sometimes," replied the child.

"Then, master Flo, you and I must be good friends—all the little children like me."

"Very bad taste if they did not," interrupted Sir Jasper, gallantly.

"I have such heaps of god-children in the village," returned Helen, laughing, "I assure you I am half-ruined at Christmas-time."

"Now come upstairs, and take off your hat," said Lady Redgrave, rising. So taking Flo's hand Helen was ushered up the wide oak stair-case, down a long corridor with doors on either side, into a spacious room hung with pale pink silk and lace. Glancing out Helen had a lovely view of the surrounding country, and noticed how plainly she could see the rising towers of Monks-Hollow, about four miles away across the river.

She turned away with a sigh, and said:

"It is so good of you to ask me here to-day, I am so pleased to come. Ever since poor Sir Robert Caryl's death I have

been nowhere. Papa felt it so deeply, and has been quite ill lately."

"I am so sorry; Sir Robert's death must indeed have been a great shock to you all. I hear that the heir, Sir Philip, is not much liked. Sir Jasper seems to think him rather good company, but then they have somewhat similar tastes—horses and shooting."

"I did not know Sir Jasper knew him," remarked Helen, smoothing her rippling chestnut hair with one of Lady Redgrave's ivory brushes.

"It is a recent acquaintance certainly, they first met at the picnic, you remember?"

Helen drew a long breath:

"Remember, yes indeed, it was the night Sir Robert was taken ill."

"Yes, and since then Sir Philip has been over here once or twice a week. Now if you are ready, we will go down," and they descended to the morning room, where Lady Redgrave resumed her work, and Nell

turned over a box of new books just come from Mudie's.

"I thought we would have a drive this afternoon," said the former, "I have some shopping to do at West Morton, and have ordered the phaeton at four o'clock."

Sir Jasper did not appear at luncheon, he had gone off to inspect a new purchase in the shape of Alderneys, and left word that he should not be back till late.

So the ladies chatted away by themselves, and thoroughly enjoyed their morning, and at four o'clock the phaeton came round with a pair of nearly thorough-bred black cobs, which Lady Redgrave handled most skilfully.

It was the end of August, the last sheaves of corn had been carried, and the voices of the reapers no longer floated down the lanes, where rich clusters of honeysuckle and luscious traveller's joy, filled the air with fragrance.

The meadow-sweet nodded its scented plumes from the river-bank, and the black-

berries were fast ripening under the ardent kisses of the autumn sun.

It was but a short distance to West Morton, and Lady Redgrave pulled up at the principal linen-drapers in the High Street, and opposite the hotel, which was much patronized by sporting gentlemen and officers from Kirkham, who found it an excellent lounge during the day.

As usual, there was a small knot of men congregated round the door-way.

"I shall not be five minutes, Miss Shafto, will you come in, or stay here?" asked Lady Redgrave, as she alighted.

"I will remain here," replied Helen, but a moment afterwards she felt half sorry that she had thus decided.

"How unpleasantly those men stare," she thought, and she drew herself up rather more proudly than usual.

"What a handsome girl!" remarked one of the men, with a big cigar in his mouth.

"Where?" asked another, emerging from the hall of the hotel.

"Over there, in black; looks thoroughbred too."

"So do the horses—awfully neat turn-out altogether. Something new in this part, I think," replied the new comer, as he tilted his hat over his eyes to keep out the rays of the sun.

"Wonder who she is?—perhaps George knows, ask him."

"Who is taking my name in vain?" asked a pleasant voice, and a tall, broad-shouldered man, about thirty or a little more, appeared at the door. He had a thick tawny moustache, and brown curling hair, cut close to his well-shaped head. His face could scarcely be called handsome, but it was frank and open, and possessed two redeeming points in the shape of a pair of fearless, dark, hazel eyes, and a set of perfect teeth.

"Here, come here, George, and tell us the name of this divinity."

"Don't know, my dear fellow, I am quite a stranger in the land, and certainly never

saw the lady before; but she is deuced good-looking, we will find out—Good God, can it be possible!" and his cheek paled, as a lady came out of the shop, and gathered up the reins, before taking her seat in the phaeton.

In an instant George Carew had dashed across the road, much to the astonishment of his companions, and lifted his hat to Lady Redgrave.

For a second her face changed as she caught sight of him, then she held out her hand in her sweet, gracious way, saying:

"I am most pleased to see you, Major Carew, though rather surprised, as only this morning I heard that you were at Naples."

"I was there two days ago, Lady Redgrave," returned he, his voice slightly trembling as he spoke, "but one gets restless after being abroad so much for the last four years, and I longed to see old England again, so I packed up my traps and came here."

"Not staying here, surely?" asked Lady Redgrave.

"Only for to-night, to-morrow I go to my cousin's, Bertie Hamlyn's—do you know him?"

"No, but my husband intends calling there, and I am sure we shall both be delighted to see you, and your cousin, at Beech-hurst."

She laid a stress on the "both" and looked steadily into his face, with something like defiance shining out of her splendid dark eyes.

"Let me introduce you to Miss Shafto—Major Carew, an old friend of ours, Helen."

Helen had been an interested witness to this scene, and quite started on hearing the name of the new acquaintance.

"You are very good, Lady Redgrave," continued he, after the introduction was over, "I shall be most pleased to call upon Sir Jasper in a day or two," and then he assisted Lady Redgrave to her seat, and the phaeton drove off.

He stood looking after it for a second, and then crossed the road with a slow step, and rejoined his companions, with a gloomy frown on his broad brow.

"You are in luck, Carew; who is she?" greeted him on all sides, but with an impatient gesture, he forced his way into the hotel, without vouchsafing a word of explanation.

"Carew's a queer fellow; sometimes I fear he is a little gone here," said he with the cigar, as he touched his forehead significantly with his finger.

"I have heard some girl in Malta played the deuce with him some years ago; they say he has never been the same since," replied his friend.

"Rum creatures women are; he might have told us who they were, beastly selfish of him. Ah, well! never mind, suppose we go and have a game of billiards," suggested the other.

Helen glanced once or twice at her companion's fair face during their homeward drive.

Lady Redgrave looked calm and unmoved, whatever she might be feeling, she kept it to herself.

"I wonder if she really cared for him," thought Helen.

As they drove into the gates at Beechhurst, Lady Redgrave bent down, and looked steadfastly at her.

"Do you believe in fate?" she asked.

"Well, yes, perhaps I do a little," replied Miss Shafto, smiling. "But why do you ask?"

Lady Redgrave sighed and shook her head, then pulling up at the door, sprang lightly out of the carriage, followed by Helen.

CHAPTER XII.

OLD MEMORIES.

FIVE o'clock in the afternoon.

Without, a drizzling rain driving down from the hills, with the mist lying thick on moor and valley; within, in the cosy nest Lady Redgrave called her boudoir, all warmth and brightness.

Sylvia sat by the hearth, in which a small fire was burning, for the afternoons were growing chilly, and its pleasant glow flickered over the tiny Dresden tea-set on the velvet table by her side. She leant back in her chair with half-shut eyes, her upturned, delicate profile shown to great advantage against the background of purple velvet cushions, and her book lay unheeded on her knee.

"A pretty picture," thought George

Carew, as he was ushered into the room by the butler.

Lady Redgrave half rose, and they shook hands.

"Please excuse this most unceremonious visit," he said, as he took a chair by the fire. "I have left all those persevering individuals still bent on potting game, but this rain was rather too much for me so I deserted and went home, and then thought I would drive over here, as I want to see Sir Jasper about those pheasants in Coombe Wood. How cheerful this fire is, it is quite chilly outside."

"Will you have some tea?" asked Lady Redgrave, handing him a cup. "I am afraid you will not see Sir Jasper at present; he has gone to Barnecombe, and will not be home till dinner-time."

"It is of no consequence," returned Carew, with an unconscious sigh of relief.

Only a month since that meeting in West Morton, but in that time Major Carew had become a constant visitor at Beech-hurst.

Sir Jasper had pressed him to stay there, but this invitation he had declined.

"If you will allow me to run over and see you sometimes, I shall be very glad, but Kirkham must be my head-quarters for the present," he had said to Sir Jasper; and he certainly had availed himself of the invitation, for scarcely a day passed without bringing him, though it was generally on matters of business connected with shooting, or the farm, or some such excuse, with Sir Jasper.

Lady Redgrave made no comment on his frequent visits. She scarcely dared to analyse her feelings with regard to him.

"I would give everything I possess never to have met him again," she would think to herself sometimes, and yet the remembrance of those long-ago, happy days, when he had been her girlish hero, thrilled her with a strange sweetness that was almost pain.

And he?

Well, he did not trouble himself to think much about it.

He only knew that he was happier in her presence than anywhere, that it was a pleasure to sit and watch her while she worked, with her child playing beside her, or to listen to the sound of her sweet voice as she sang in the cool perfumy drawing-room, and in the evenings to wander with her amongst the trees and flower-beds in the old-fashioned garden.

So he sought her day after day, without heeding whether it was right or wrong, or doing an injury to the woman who had once loved and deceived him.

He often wondered, too, if she were quite as happy as she appeared, with so much wealth and luxury at her command.

"I wonder if her husband bullies her," he mused this afternoon, as he watched the firelight flickering over the pure brow, while little gleams of gold lit up the darkness of her hair. "Why should she have that wistful expression in her face

whenever I find her alone? Good God! if I thought he——" but he broke off in his musings, and turning abruptly, asked: "Are you going to the county ball next week?"

"I suppose so; I am so fond of dancing."

"As fond as you were in Malta?" he said.

It was the first time the past had ever been mentioned by them, and the colour deepened on Lady Redgrave's delicate cheek and her hand trembled as she put down her tea-cup.

"Yes, quite," she replied, with a nervous little laugh; "it is not so very long ago."

"Only five or six years, not long enough to be quite forgotten," he returned, in a low voice; and then silence crept over them, broken at length by the rather noisy entrance of Flo, who rushed in hugging a large picture-book, which he insisted upon showing to Carew, with whom he was great friends.

Lady Redgrave always declared it was

because he constantly found "goodies" in that gentleman's pockets.

Carew was not sorry for the interruption, the silence was fast becoming painful.

"Flo, come here; you mustn't worry Major Carew," said his mother.

"No, come and play with me, do," answered Flo, looking up at the Major with his big brown eyes, which coaxing appeal had the effect of taking Carew into the hall with his small tormentor, where for the next quarter of an hour confusion reigned supreme.

Presently he returned with Flo sitting on his shoulder, a perfect picture of childish mischief, with his eyes sparkling with fun, and his golden curls tossed in wild disorder over his shoulders.

"Papa, papa, I hear papa!" shouted he, and he scrambled down, and trotted off into the hall.

"You must be wet through, dear," remarked Lady Redgrave, as she followed her son, and came upon Sir Jasper,

emerging from sundry macintoshes and wraps.

"No, not wet, but confoundedly hungry. Ah! Carew, how d'ye do—very glad to see you. We shall just have time for a cigar before dinner. Of course you will stop."

"Thanks, but I'm not dressed; I only came over to see you about Coombe Wood."

"Ah, we'll talk about that after dinner. Your trap is here I see; easily send your man home for a change," replied Sir Jasper, rather impatiently.

"Then I'll stay with pleasure."

"That's right, now come and have a cigar. Ah, you've been having tea, I see," glancing at the table still by the fire; "can't say I care much for it myself, prefer something a little stronger, all very well for women," and he walked out, followed by Carew, whose expression, as he shut the door upon the cosy, bright little room, evinced a decided inclination to remain where he was.

Sylvia Redgrave sighed as the door

closed, she took her boy on her knee, and pressed her cheek to his rosy little face.

"My boy, my pretty one," she whispered, as he put his arms round her neck, and hugged her fondly.

"Flo, I have only you in all this wide world to love and care for."

"And papa," said he, in his sweet childish voice, kissing her.

She put him down abruptly, and went over to the window.

The rain had ceased, and darkness was gathering, the landscape was dimmed and blurred with mist, and Sylvia's eyes were dimmed and blurred with tears, and she could see nothing.

For a few moments she stood there with fast-clasped hands, and then she turned, and said:

"Now, boy, you really must come up stairs to nurse. It is bed-time."

"Goodie first," replied he, looking up archly into his mother's face.

"Very well, when we get into the nur-

sery," she said with a smile, as she held out her arms to him.

He sprang into them, and she carried him upstairs and saw him undressed and safely tucked up in his little cot by her bedside.

She was devotedly attached to her child, and could scarcely bear him out of her sight. It seemed as if all the passionate love in her impulsive heart was poured out upon her son.

CHAPTER XIII.

GOLD VERSUS LOVE.

WHEN Lady Redgrave descended to the drawing-room dressed for dinner, she found Colonel Vyvyan there, whom Sir Jasper had invited that afternoon, but had forgotten to inform his wife of the fact.

But Sylvia was quite accustomed to occasional droppers-in at all meals, and was unfeignedly glad to see the Colonel, who was rather a favourite of hers.

Sir Jasper and he were very good friends, though but recent acquaintances. They had mutual hobbies in the subjects of game-laws, farming, horses, etc.

Dinner being announced, they proceeded to the dining room, and seated themselves at a perfectly appointed table, bright with flowers, glass, and rare old silver.

The dishes were excellent, the wine per-

fection, and the servants waited noiselessly and swiftly.

Sir Jasper seemed in good spirits, and Lady Redgrave was thankful to find him so agreeably disposed, as he had an awkward trick, when not amused, of finding fault with everything that came to table, a habit that was extremely annoying to his wife, and rather trying to his guests.

Carew glanced at her face once or twice when her husband addressed her in his usual brusque fashion, a feeling of indignation stirring in his breast.

She looked more animated than usual to-night, and her dress, of some silky yellow material, trimmed with creamy lace, suited her, and displayed to advantage her perfect figure.

"Do you know the Beresfords?" she asked presently, addressing Carew.

"Only slightly," replied he.

"They were coming to us for the 1st, but for some reason, their visit was postponed, and we expect them to-morrow."

"They are very nice people," said Sir Jasper, "especially the eldest son, Edward, he is a rattling good fellow. Jack, the younger, is in the same regiment as that poor fellow, Raymond Vandeleur. You know him, I think, Colonel."

"Yes, very well; nice business that of Vandeleur's, I never felt so sorry for anyone before," replied the Colonel. "He has been staying with us for some time, but has now gone to his rooms in town."

"I have heard lately that Sir Philip Caryl is awfully in love with Miss Shafto," said Carew.

"Nonsense," laughed Sylvia, "Helen would not look at him."

"You forget that circumstances are altered now," returned Carew; "Lady Shafto is a clever and ambitious woman, and Sir Philip has large estates.

"I am quite sure Helen would never be tempted by them to forsake her affianced lover," replied Sylvia, earnestly.

"Are you sure she is engaged to Vandeleur?" asked Sir Jasper.

"I had it from herself; she is so good and brave, she will never become Lady Caryl."

"Really, you are getting quite excited about her," said Sir Jasper, with a cold smile; "there are a great many women in the world, who have given up more than she for gold and lands; they all manage to survive, and I daresay are pretty comfortable under the affliction."

"Very likely," replied Sylvia, as she slowly took up her handkerchief and fan, and prepared to depart.

As Carew opened the door for her, their eyes met for one brief second, his full of sympathy and compassion, hers of a nameless fear.

"Could it be fear?" he asked himself, as he returned to his seat; "if so, fear of whom or what?"

Sylvia went into the drawing-room, and let her fingers ramble over the keys of the

piano, and as she was playing the prelude to a dreamy German valse, she thought of Helen Shafto, and in her heart was an unspoken prayer that she might be spared the misery of marrying one man, whilst her love was given to another.

"This is sad music," interrupted a voice at her side, and George Carew leant over the piano, and watched the small white hands, as they glided gently over the keys.

"How soon you have left them," she remarked.

"I fancied myself *de trop;* in fact, Sir Jasper almost gave me my *congé*, he and Vyvyan are deep in the mysteries of farming."

Sylvia laughed.

"Ever since he has bought the Upland Farm he has been almost crazy on the subject; but let us go out, it is a warm night, and quite fine, and if you are very good, I will let you smoke a cigar."

So they sauntered out past the dining-room windows, into the verandah which

shaded Lady Redgrave's morning-room, and where there were some low-cushioned chairs.

Then Carew lighted his cigar, and they both lapsed into silence.

"When do you leave Kirkham?" she asked, at length.

"The end of this week, I think. Bertie Hamlyn wants me to stay on, but I think he must be getting tired of me. I do not know what to do with myself in England, after being away so long one feels quite out of it. I shall stay in town till after Christmas, and then I expect to be again a wanderer on the face of the earth."

"What made you leave the service?"

"Oh! I got tired of it; a lot of our fellows left, and the regiment wasn't the same to me. All my friends of six or seven years ago are dead or married, and most of them have entirely forgotten the existence of such a worthless fellow as George Carew."

He spoke rather bitterly, and knocked the ash off his cigar somewhat impatiently.

"Don't think there is no one to take any interest in you," began Sylvia, feeling rather nervous. "Sir Jasper does, I am sure; only this morning he told me how much he liked you; and if my friendship will make you feel less lonely you have it."

He blew out a cloud of smoke before he replied:

"Your friendship would be very sweet to me, Lady Redgrave, but, I confess I have not much faith in a friendship between a man and woman, where both are young, and one of them lovely."

"I am sorry I mentioned it, Major Carew," replied Sylvia, gently, "but you seemed sad when you spoke of losing all your old friends, and I should so like to help you if it were possible, if only—if only—to atone in some measure for all my—" her voice quivered, and died away inaudibly.

"When I looked upon your face five years ago, I hoped never to see it again—but since Fate has thought fit to throw us once more

together, we had better let bygones be bygones. I do not blame you now for anything that is past; I blamed you then—but since that time I have learned something of the threats, tears, and entreaties, which were resorted to to separate us."

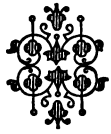
He rose as he spoke, and threw away the end of his cigar. Then he took Lady Redgrave's slender white hand in his, and held it in a firm clasp. "I accept your friendship, Lady Redgrave, and I pray Heaven that nothing may ever cause you to regret having bestowed it on me."

Then they sauntered back to the drawing-room, where the gentlemen sat down to cards, and Lady Redgrave retired.

As she knelt down beside her child's cot, and watched his peaceful slumbers, she thought over the events of the evening, and felt glad that she had secured the friendship of George Carew, and that the past should be henceforth a sealed book to them.

"Thank God he knows I was not all to blame," she whispered.

And yet it was a dangerous compact into which she had so innocently entered. She little knew how insecure was the ground on which she was standing, that at any moment it might give way, and plunge her into the depths beneath.



CHAPTER XIV.

WILL YOU GIVE ME YOUR DAUGHTER?

"Trust me all in all, or
Not at all."

THE day before Raymond Vandeleur left the Priory, he determined to go at once and see Sir Felix Shafto.

He felt that he could no longer bear the suspense about his engagement with Helen.

Accordingly, with inward trepidation but a great show of coolness, he went up to the Court, but found Sir Felix out and Lady Shafto alone in the drawing-room.

This was not exactly what he wished, but there was no time to retreat, so he rallied his forces, and after some light skirmishing, boldly commenced the attack after Lady Shafto had given him a lead by a few kind gracious words of sympathy, with respect to his uncle's death, and his own altered prospects.

"I expect to quit England very shortly, Lady Shafto; a few weeks ago I hoped to leave the army and settle down here, and intended to ask you and Sir Felix if you would give me Helen for my wife. I spoke to my uncle about it the night he was taken ill, and he was very pleased, and told me that Monks-Hollow was mine——"

"He said that?" exclaimed Lady Shafto, startled.

"Yes, indeed, they were the last words he ever spoke to me," and Ray stopped, overcome by the remembrance. "However, that is past, we will say no more about it; in spite of my being no longer the possessor of Monks-Hollow, I am bold enough to ask you if you will give me the slightest hope that Helen may one day be mine."

"He is terribly in earnest," thought my lady, "it will not do to drive him to urgent measures, we must compromise a little."

"I am really very sorry for you, Raymond," she replied, with her most gracious

manner; "but you must surely be aware that with your present income you could scarcely afford to marry, besides; I think it hardly fair to a girl brought up as Helen has been, with every wish gratified from her earliest years."

"Say no more," interrupted Raymond, his cheek paling as he spoke. "I do not expect to marry at present, we are both young, and willing to wait for a year; things may be different then, if only you will sanction our engagement, we shall be satisfied."

"Perhaps you fancy Helen has money?" remarked my lady, rather nervously.

"It would not be unreasonable to imagine so, as she is your only child," he replied; "but I do not want money with her—if she had it, it would be settled strictly on herself, she is equally dear to me without a penny."

"You are very good, Raymond; I think it right to tell you that, beyond a couple of hundreds a year, Helen will have nothing.

Sir Felix will explain this more fully to you than I can do."

Ray looked and felt surprised. He had had no idea that money was scarce at Shafto Court.

"And now," continued Lady Shafto, "let there be no engagement between you and Helen—leave her quite free for eighteen months; she is very young, and at the end of that time, if you are still both in the same mind, we will then consider what can be done in the event of your marrying."

"I cannot say I am altogether satisfied," said Ray, biting his moustache. "I suppose we may correspond, her letters will be such a comfort to me?"

"No, Raymond, I can have no regular system of letters between you and Helen; she must be free, utterly and entirely, for a year; if at the end, she still loves you, she shall be yours." And she held out her hand to Ray with a smile, saying:

"Forgive me, Ray, if I wound you; but

you may write to me, or Sir Felix, as often as you please."

So Raymond was obliged to let it rest as Lady Shafto had decided, and though he felt that my lady had been one too many for him; still, things were better than either he, or Helen, had anticipated.

"After all, dear," she said to him, when he had told her the result of the interview, "we have not very much to complain of; never mind what mamma says, I consider myself as much bound to you as if it were a recognised engagement: a year will soon pass away, and then—" and she looked up into her lover's face with a charming smile, and a half-shy tender light in her deep violet eyes.

He pressed her close to his side, and asked:

"Has Philip been here lately?"

"No, we have only seen him once; he has been over to Beech-hurst to dine several times, and we hear he is thinking of going abroad in a few days. Did you not know it?"

"No, he and I have not met since I left Monks-Hollow. Nell, I hate to leave you here, near him," he exclaimed, suddenly seizing her soft white hand with a fierce grasp; "your mother is, I fear, no friend to us now, and he is rich and plausible, it drives me mad to think of you within reach of his bad influence."

"Raymond, surely you can trust me?" reproachfully.

"Yes, my darling, I can, and do trust you entirely; but, oh! Nell, you have no idea of how tortured I am at the idea of leaving you. Sometimes I think I will throw up the army, and remain in England, and then again what can I do here—nothing; my only chance of getting on lies in my going abroad."

"Have no fear, my dearest, nothing but death shall ever come between us. As to Philip," and here Helen shrugged her shoulders with the prettiest air imaginable, "he is the last person in the world to be uneasy about. I hate the very sight of

him, Ray," and she looked up with an arch smile. "If they bother me very much, I shall have to run away; will it be very far to come?"

"I wish to Heaven you would!" was her lover's passionate response, as he smoothed her rippling locks that lay thick and soft upon her brow.

"Have you heard from the Horse-Guards yet?" she asked, anxiously.

"Nothing is settled yet, but our destination will be the Cape, not India."

"And how about writing?"

"Your mother says, 'No,' Nell."

"You do not suppose that I am going to let you be away for a whole year, and not write to you?"

"Nell, you mustn't be disobedient!" with a shake of his head, and a smile that belied his words.

"Well, of course, if you would rather not hear from me——"

"Don't jest about it, child, your letters will be the only thing to live for out there."

"Then I will write every mail, and you must write to them sometimes, and tell them all you are doing."

After this little arrangement, he took his departure, and after bidding his friends at the Priory farewell, went up to town, and was speedily settled in his new rooms with Jack Beresford. After he had been there about a week, he received an important-looking document, informing him that he was to hold himself in readiness to depart for the Cape with a draft of the regiment at a certain date within the next three weeks.

"Here it is at last!" he exclaimed, as, having read it, he threw it across the table to Beresford, who was playing loo with three other men.

"Lucky beggar! I wish I were going. You are likely to have some fighting there, those Zulus are getting deuced troublesome," remarked one of them. "When do you go out, Jack?"

"Pretty soon, I expect, if matters grow

serious, of which there is every prospect; the sooner the better, I am sick to death of field-days, Colchester and Aldershot. Now, boys, let us drink to the health of Raymond Vandeleur, as good a friend and comrade as ever wore her Majesty's uniform, and confound his enemies!" exclaimed Jack, jumping up and seizing a bottle of champagne standing open on the table.

"Fill up your glasses, bumpers this time!"

The toast was drank amongst much laughter, and clinking of glasses, and shortly after the party dispersed.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. BERESFORD VISITS THE PRIORY.

A FORTNIGHT later, Raymond Vandeleur lay full length on a sofa in his rooms in Jermyn Street, with a big cigar in his mouth, and Jack reclined gracefully in an arm-chair, with his legs in another, puffing away at his favourite meerschaum.

London was hot and stifling, and no air came in at the widely-opened windows, whilst St. James' Street was one dreary space of bricks and mortar.

"You'd better come down with me to-morrow, old man, and see me well through it all," said Ray, knocking the ash off his cigar, "you will be very welcome at the Priory," with a laugh at Jack's rapidly reddening countenance, "and to-morrow evening we are all to dine at Shafto Court."

Jack puffed out a thick cloud of tobacco to somewhat obscure his rubicund visage, and answered quietly:

"All right, I shall be delighted, London is insufferable just now."

"We must send my things on to Southampton by Wilson, so as to leave me all the time I can possibly spare for Downshire."

"Shall we go down by the 4.20 express?" asked Jack.

"No; I rather think of going early to-morrow morning, lunching at the 'White Hart,' and running over to Shafto Court, and taking them by surprise. Helen thinks I shall be down by the 4.20, but I can't afford to lose three hours of her society."

"You had better let her know, or she may be out."

"Yes; I will send a note over to her from the 'White Hart,' when we arrive; you won't mind my leaving you, Jack, I daresay you will be able to amuse yourself?" said Ray, looking rather impertinently at his friend, who flushed up to the roots of his hair.

"Don't mention it, I shall be all right," replied he, rather angrily, at which Ray laughed, and then had to duck his head to avoid collision with Kinglake's *Crimea* which they had been studying.

* * * * * *

It is a soft, warm afternoon late in September, and the woods are looking their loveliest, with the varied coloring of the trees, now rapidly changing from green to the crimson tints which autumn paints upon their leaves.

The mosses lift their tiny brown cups, refreshed by the dew which has fallen overnight, and amongst the fading fronds of the tall brake-fern the rabbits frisk playfully, nothing heeding, a tall, slender figure, clad in a white cambric dress, adorned with black ribbons, which leans on the gate leading to the park of Shafto Court.

Helen looks charming to-day.

The anticipation of seeing her lover has given a soft rose flush to her creamy cheek, and a deeper light to her eyes.

She wears a large straw hat in which she has placed a bunch of poppies, and a knot of the same flowers is in her bosom.

A fair picture she seems to Raymond, as he emerges from the high road and catches sight of her.

She unlatches the gate as he approaches, and holds out two little white hands with a bright smile of welcome, love and pride illumining her sweet face as she looks up at him coming rapidly towards her, clad in dark grey tweed, which sets off to advantage his lithe muscular limbs, and notes the spotless linen, the utter absence of jewellery save one gold ring upon his slim brown hand, a gift of her own, the curls of dark, closely-cut hair peeping beneath his hat, and the expression of intense joy which lights up his somewhat stern countenance.

"You look very charming, Miss Shafto, this afternoon," says he, holding her in his arms and gazing at her with impassioned eagerness, "I really do begin to think I love you a little bit."

"Oh!" replies she, with an irresistible pout, "how wicked of you to say so, I think I ought to have stayed at home."

"Did you get my note safely?"

"Yes; I saw a boy coming up the shrubbery with it, and, having a presentiment, went out to him myself."

"What have you done with my lady?" looking at her fondly.

"Mamma had gone to the Priory to lunch with Mrs. Campbell, so I had no trouble, the coast was clear. But now tell me when do you go?" falteringly.

"Early Thursday morning."

Her eyes filled with sudden tears, and she hides her face on his shoulder for a brief space.

"You must be brave, my darling," he says, huskily, caressing the slender white hand which lies in his firm clasp; "remember that every tear you shed will be an additional stab to me. But come, we must not think of to-morrow, let us be happy this lovely afternoon, without a thought of the future."

So they find a seat among the bracken on a fallen tree,

> "And Love took up the glass of time,
> And turned it in his glowing hands;
> Every moment, lightly shaken,
> Ran itself in golden sands."

How slowly the hours lag when we are unhappy, but they fly with winged feet when we are the reverse. How often do we seek to grasp them as they pass, but alas! they will not stay for our weak hands; the inexorable scythe mows steadily on, in spite of all our tears and entreaties.

It is the last day that Helen and Raymond will spend together.

They are basking in the ambient light that love sheds around, and see nothing of the white line of breakers, far out in the horizon, which threatens to wreck their future.

Meanwhile Jack Beresford had made his way over to the Priory, and as he reached the hall-door, the first person to gladden his sight was Evelyn Carisford, armed with a large parasol and a novel.

"How do you do?" said she, opening her brown eyes to their widest extent, and giving Jack the benefit of a pretty little blush, which was trebly reflected in his honest countenance.

"This is a surprise, but come into the morning-room. Lady Shafto and a lot of other people are in the drawing-room with Auntie. I had just slipped away, intending to get into the boat and read."

"Pray don't let me interrupt such a charming arrangement, I will come with you if I may, perhaps you would like a row."

"That will be delightful," replied she, and she led the way to the edge of the lawn, where a roomy, softly-cushioned boat was moored, and having seated herself, Jack pushed off, and pulled down the stream.

The boat glided along with a gentle rocking motion, between high green banks crowned with flags, meadow-sweet, and rushes, and a few large white water-lilies lay floating on their broad leaves at the

water's brink. Evelyn leant over the side of the boat, and let one hand trail in the clear brown water.

"Will you get me some water-lilies, Mr. Beresford," she asked, looking up with such a bewitching smile on her dark *riante* face, that Jack felt an insane desire to upset the boat, if only for the pleasure of rescuing her.

"On one condition only, Miss Carisford."

"Name it, sir."

"That you drop 'Mr. Beresford,' and henceforth give me my plain name of 'Jack.'"

"Certainly, with pleasure."

"Then you shall have an acre of water-lilies in the space of five minutes."

"I shall be quite contented with two or three," replied Evelyn, as they glided into the midst of the queenly flowers.

After she had obtained as many as she wanted, she said:

"Now let us stay under this tree for a

time, it is too hot for you to row, besides I want to hear how you come to be in this part of the world."

After Jack had secured the boat to an overhanging branch, he told her how he had accompanied Raymond Vandeleur, and that they were staying at the "White Hart," for the night.

"Poor Helen! it is a terrible blow for her," said Evelyn, when he had finished; "what a shame it is that Sir Robert left no will."

"He left a will right enough, I am sure," replied Jack, nodding his head, and looking very wise.

"Where is it then?"

"Ask Philip Caryl!"

"Oh! Jack, what do you think?"

Jack flushed to his temples at hearing his name, he had never heard it sound so nicely before; however he took no notice, but answered gravely:

"I think a great deal, but I say nothing."

"And I think Philip Caryl is rather an

ill-used individual. Everyone runs him down—his is really not an enviable position."

"You are about the only one who thinks so," said Jack, laughing, as he lighted a cigar with Miss Carisford's permission, and settled himself comfortably in the bow of the boat.

Just then a few cows came down from the meadows near to drink.

"Here are some of your enemies, Miss Carisford," glancing at his companion with a demure smile. "Do you remember the bull?"

"Pray do not refer to that detestable afternoon," replied Evelyn, rather crossly; "when I think of the spectacle I must have presented to them all, in your arms, in the middle of the river, I feel quite hot," and she put her pretty dimpled hands up to her cheeks, which were vividly blushing.

"I have the sensation of being dreadfully snubbed," exclaimed Jack, sitting up,

and tilting his hat over his eyes, so that only the end of his nose was visible.

"You deserve it, after making me look so ridiculous," said Evelyn, with some asperity.

"What was I to do? you would not face the bull, and you positively refused to remain on that stone for the rest of the evening, so nothing remained but to carry you ashore. I am so sorry you found it so unpleasant, to me the recollection is most agreeable. By-the-bye, was the Colonel very angry with me?" asked Jack, rather maliciously.

"No; I don't suppose he took the trouble to even think of you," retorted Evelyn, blushing still more.

"Don't be cross, or I shall have to punish you," said Jack, with imperturbable gravity.

"What impertinence!" replied Evelyn, stifling a laugh.

"If you say another word I shall take you into the middle of the stream, and

upset the boat," returned Jack, looking very stern.

"You frighten me, I apologize; but pray do not try to appear dignified, it does not become you."

"Why?"

"Because you only end in looking extremely sulky."

"Miss Carisford, you are incorrigible."

"Do you not think some tea would be refreshing after so much contention, suppose we return to the lawn?"

Jack got up and pushed off the boat, and began rowing slowly towards the house. They found Mrs. Campbell and tea awaiting them in a rustic bower, which was a favourite resort of Evelyn's, a charming little nook, covered with clematis and honeysuckle.

Jack often remembered that pleasant afternoon in later days, when far away—Evelyn's bright face peeping at him from behind the silver tea-kettle, the ripple of the river just below the arbour, and the

great coils of starry clematis now turning rapidly to berries, which surrounded the doorway. But the best things come to an end, and Jack, having consumed as many cups of tea and slices of cake as his fair enslaver offered him, was obliged to take his departure.

"Do not say 'Good-bye,' but *au revoir*," said Miss Carisford with a smile, as she held out her hand.

Jack's face flushed to the roots of his fair, curly hair.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You will be dreadfully tired of me before the evening is over; do you not know that we dine at Shafto Court to-night?"

"I am delighted," stammered Jack, feeling insanely inclined to tell her, there and then, that nothing could make him happier than to have her society for the rest of his life; but, fortunately, Mrs. Campbell's presence checked any such outburst, and they all walked soberly to the gate.

"Yes, we are all coming to see the last of that poor fellow, Raymond; I am so sorry for him," said Mrs. Campbell. "How does he bear his reverses, Mr. Beresford?"

"Like a regular brick," replied Jack, with enthusiasm, "he seldom mentions the subject now, but is so brave and uncomplaining. All our fellows are awfully sorry for him. I am afraid Sir Philip would find it rather 'warm' if he shewed himself among us."

"Ah! well, we must not judge Philip harshly; do you know that he is going abroad?"

"Really?"

"Yes, he starts next week, and Monks-Hollow is to be shut up."

"Well, I must be off, or I shall be late," and with a touching glance at Miss Carisford, which she purposely avoided, Jack raised his hat, and walked rapidly away.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LAST EVENING.

THE little party assembled at Shafto Court that night was a very merry one, in spite of the obviously flagging spirits of both Helen and Raymond Vandeleur.

Evelyn and Jack rattled away with their usual vivacity, and caused a good deal of amusement, whilst Colonel Vyvyan related several interesting anecdotes of his Ashantee campaign.

"Have you decided upon remaining here this winter?" he asked, presently, turning to Sir Felix.

"No, we are thinking of spending it in Paris," replied Sir Felix.

"Really, papa?" said Helen, looking at her father with surprise.

"You have not heard of our arrangement yet, Nell, in fact, it was only settled this morning; but your mother found last winter very trying, and I daresay we shall all be better for the change."

"How delightful!" sighed Evelyn, "how I wish I were going also. Guardy, do you not think we might join them; you know how bad Auntie's rheumatism always is in the winter."

They all laughed, and Mrs. Campbell replied:

"That is two for yourself and one for me. Miss Evy."

"Don't talk of winter," said Jack, with a comic air, "we may be eaten up by savages by that time."

"It is fortunate that your mother cannot hear you, Jack," laughed Raymond, "whatever will she do without you at Christmas time?"

"Are you so very useful?" asked Evelyn, turning her arch brown eyes upon him.

"Oh, extremely! I have such duties to

perform; no end of pretty cousins to look after and flirt with, which is quite a safe proceeding, as I am only a younger son, and heaps of coals, candles, tea, beef, and bales of red flannel to dispense to the old women in the village. You need not laugh so, Miss Carisford; I assure you I am a most useful member of society, and my mother often tells me that I fulfil my duties with the most praiseworthy exactitude."

"Dear me! appearances are deceitful; I should not have believed it of you," replied Evelyn, gravely. "And, pray, what part does your brother take in the proceedings?"

"Ah! he does the grand seigneur; troubles himself about nothing, shifts all unpleasant, or irksome business upon my shoulders, and enjoys life as thoroughly as any man can do with all the prettiest women of the country smiling upon him, an utter absence of duns, and undisputed possession of a very comfortable little income. I only wish I were in his shoes!"

"I should think he is rather spoilt," said Evelyn.

"Not a bit; he is the best fellow in the world, and the most good-hearted. I should like you to know him."

"Evidently a perfect paragon, and I hate paragons!"

"We were invited to meet him and Mrs. Beresford at Lady Redgrave's dinner-party, but you know their visit was postponed at the last minute," said Lady Shafto.

"Yes, was it not unfortunate, the second time too that they had been asked, but my mother was taken so ill with her old enemy, neuralgia, that it was impossible for her to travel. However, Lady Redgrave has very kindly invited them again, so I trust they will arrive there safely this time," and then he dived under the table for Evelyn's fan, and the ladies rose.

The rest of the evening was full of grief and pain to Helen.

She was so unused to sorrow; hitherto, life had been to her one uninterrupted

scene of happiness; now she was face to face with what seemed an insurmountable trouble.

It is so hard to suffer when one is young; how keenly we feel all joys and sorrows in the spring of our lives, it is only old age that blunts the edge of our feelings, and makes us realize the meaning of self-control and resignation.

As the hands of the clock moved slowly round, but one thought seemed to pervade Helen's brain: "This time to-morrow I shall be alone."

She looked at her mother and Mrs. Campbell chattering together, and wondered, with the selfishness of youth, how they could be so happy when she was so miserable.

Leaving Evelyn at the piano, she strolled out on the balcony, and threw herself into a low seat, whilst the tears, she had so bravely repressed all day, found their way to her eyes.

She was unconscious of how long she

had been there, when a quick, manly step aroused her from her reverie.

"Nell, are you there, my child; what is this—tears? Oh, my darling, it tortures me to see you so," and Ray kneels down beside her, and draws the slight quivering form into his arms.

She leans her head upon his shoulder in a perfect agony of grief, whilst he, also feeling heart-sick with misery, kisses the tear-flushed cheeks and smooths the ripples of her chestnut hair.

Gradually he talks her into a calmer frame of mind, her sobs die away, and something like a smile quivers round her mouth when he reminds her that Sir Felix has asked him to breakfast

"And now, my love, I want you to sing me one song before I leave to-night; come into the little drawing-room, there is no one there, Miss Carisford is in the billiard-room with the gentlemen. Do not refuse me, Nell, it will be so long before I hear your sweet voice again—come.'

So he led her, half reluctant, into the music-room, where a grand piano stood in a recess. Crimson silk *portières* divided it from the large drawing-room, where the two elderly ladies still sat talking.

"What shall it be, Ray?" asked Nell, turning over a pile of music.

"This," and he placed a copy of Cowen's "It was a dream" on the music stand.

Helen began with a low, faltering voice, which grew stronger and steadier as she proceeded.

She sang the second verse with her whole heart. Raymond Vandeleur will hear that sweet, clear voice sounding in his ears for many many nights to come, in the starry radiance of the southern sky, beside the camp fires, in that far-off land where Zulu warriors are even now threatening our peace, and the Angel of Death is spreading his sable wings.

As the song dies away in trembling chords, Ray's face is hidden in his hands,

but as she turns round he recovers himself with an effort.

"Now, good-night, my darling, I shall go and have one cigar with Sir Felix and the others, and you go to bed—you must be quite tired out—I shall be round early to-morrow morning."

"Good-night, Ray; before I go I must give you this," and she hands him a small, velvet case.

As he opens it, she lays a slender hand upon his shoulder, and they look at it together.

It is an exquisite minature of herself, painted on ivory.

"No fear of my forgetting you now, Nell," a half-smile crossing his pained young face, as he passes an arm round her, and gazes into the dreamy depths of her loving eyes. "That portrait will be a talisman against all evil, do not fear for me now, my Nell, I shall bear a charmed life whilst that sweet face lies against my heart."

He crushes her almost despairingly to his

breast, and presses a long, passionate kiss upon her upturned face, and then hastily quits the room.

* * * * * *

The guests are gone, and Sir Felix and my lady are alone in the drawing-room.

He paces the room with impatient footsteps, as he says:

"This is a most unfortunate affair; I wish we could have put a stop to it entirely."

"Quite impossible," replies my lady; "I have done the best I can; twelve months is a long time, and she may change her mind. Do not trouble yourself about the matter, it will probably die a natural death; he goes to-morrow, and there will be an end of it."

"I suppose they will not correspond?"

"No; I am determined to prevent it; Raymond has begged me to-night to alter my decision, but I was firm. We must both do all that we can to make her forget him, and for that reason I am glad we are to winter abroad. I only wish he had said

good-bye to her to-night instead of coming again to-morrow. She has no little self-control, and I am afraid of a scene."

"I would give all I have if Philip Caryl were not in possession of Monks-Hollow," says Sir Felix with a weary sigh.

Lady Shafto looks at him with surprise.

"Really, I was not aware that you had any dislike to that much-abused individual."

"I am afraid of him," replies the baronet, in a whisper.

"Afraid, why?" demands my lady, eagerly.

Sir Felix looks fearfully round the room, and then seizing his wife's wrist, mutters a few words in her ear.

She starts back and gazes at him with horror-stricken eyes.

"Great Heavens! what will become of us?"

"There is nothing to be done but to marry Helen to a wealthy man; when once she is off our hands——"

Sir Felix finishes his sentence by an ex-

pressive shrug of his shoulders, lights his bedroom candle, and prepares to depart.

"Why did you not tell me this before?" asks my lady, with an ominous tremble in her voice.

"Why should I trouble you with such matters? The debt has been increasing for years—who would have thought Caryl would have left his affairs in such an unsatisfactory condition. It would have been paid off last spring but for that d—d unlucky spec of mine."

"If only you would give up dabbling on the Stock Exchange," exclaims my lady, angrily; "we shall find ourselves without a roof over our heads one of these days."

But Sir Felix, afraid of the storm, makes his escape, leaving Lady Shafto to digest the news he has just told her—news which turns her cheek ashy pale, and makes her heart stand still with sheer despair and horror.

The whole of his property is heavily mortgaged to Sir Philip Caryl.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GIRL HE LEFT BEHIND HIM.

THE next morning dawned bright and clear.

"What is it?" thought Helen, as she opened her eyes to the sunbeams.

"What is going to happen to-day. Ah! I remember now," and she sprang out of bed with a heavy sigh, and opening her window, leant her arms on the sill, and buried her face in a cluster of late autumn roses, which peeped blushingly into the room. Such a soft misty morning, with a suspicion of cold in the fragrant air blowing down from the distant blue hills, and waving the plumes of the meadow grasses. But Helen was too down-cast to notice the beauty of the calm autumn morning; her only thought was:

"Good Heaven, how wretched I am! How shall I get through this dreadful day?"

While dressing, she however resolved to meet her trouble with a brave heart, and descended to greet her lover at breakfast, with a firm step, and a bright, confident expression on her fair face.

"You will be alone to-night, Helen," remarked Lady Shafto, as they left the room later on;" we are dining out, you know; send a note to Evelyn, and ask her to come here, and spend the evening with you."

"I should prefer to be alone, mamma," replied Helen, with a quivering lip.

"I wish it, Helen," said my lady with an impatient glance at her daughter's sweet, pale face.

So Helen obediently penned her note, and then rushed off for her hat, to join Raymond Vandeleur in the garden.

There was such a little time left them to spend together; Nell felt sick at heart as she looked at the hall-clock—he was to leave

at one, and it was now nearly eleven. But Lady Shafto had determined that they should not have two hours of uninterrupted happiness, for she joined them in the garden in a few minutes, under pretence of taking Raymond to one of the houses to see a new orchid, and talked so much, and so energetically, that they found it utterly impossible to get rid of her.

"I shall go mad if mamma does not go away soon," thought poor Helen; "what can she be thinking of, she must know she is dreadfully *de trop*."

But my lady was troubled with no such ideas.

Since last night she had quite determined that Helen must not marry Raymond, she had been awake half the night pondering how she could accomplish her purpose of separating her daughter from her lover, and had arranged one or two little schemes, which only required time to effect. Presently, finding that she had no intention of leaving them, Helen led the way into the

drawing-room, and threw herself wearily into an arm-chair, and Sir Felix joined them.

"You will stay to luncheon, Raymond," he said.

"No, thanks, I must be off in twenty minutes."

Then Helen got up, and went into the conservatory, and after a little conversation with Sir Felix, Ray walked boldly in after her, and shut the door, and even Lady Shafto had not the heart to follow him.

Neither will we; do we not most of us know what it is to part with some one we love best in the world. Do we not know that sickening feeling of agony and despair which comes over us, as we look into the eyes which may meet ours no more in this world, and clasp to our aching bosom the beloved form round which our very heart strings are entwined.

Raymond Vandeleur came out of the conservatory alone, with a white, set face, and after shaking hands warmly with Sir

Felix and Lady Shafto, got into the carriage which was to convey him to the "White Hart," and drove rapidly away.

The sound of the departing wheels struck on Helen's ear as the knell of doom. She knew that she was alone—that no longer would she look forward to his coming from day to day; no longer would his presence fill her with an infinite sense of happiness and peace—that the next twelve months would be one dreary blank, and the whole world a waste since he was gone!

The rest of the day passed like a dream.

Tears would have been a relief, but she could not cry; her head ached with a numb, dull pain of which she was scarcely conscious, and her whole being seemed paralysed.

Evelyn came over in the afternoon, and was unusually tender and thoughtful to her friend. She did not avoid the subject of Raymond's departure, but spoke of it in such a sweet, womanly, sympathising way,

that Helen's heart opened to her; one look at Evelyn's soft, brown eyes ,swimming in tears, unlocked the flood-gates of her grief, and throwing herself into her friend's loving arms, she gave way to the full tide of her sorrow.

Later on, Sir Felix and Lady Shafto having departed, the two girls decided against dinner, and instead, had tea in Helen's morning-room, and lulled by the warm, drowsy air, and the hum of the gnats in the dying sunshine, Evelyn fell fast asleep.

Helen gazed at her sadly for a few minutes.

"How I wish I could sleep—sleep for a year! What a wretched parting it was; no time to say anything to him. How cruel of mamma to stay with us so long!"

She leant out of the window, whilst great tears rolled down her cheeks, and fell upon her clasped hands.

"Nell," said a low voice below.

"Great Heaven!" she exclaimed, "can

it be possible?" her heart beat to suffocation, and a rushing sound as of many waters filled her ears, making her faint and giddy; she grew white as death, as her eyes met the face she loved so dearly, the face she had thought she would not see again for so long.

"Make haste, child, come down into the garden."

"But I do not understand; what does it all mean?" asked Helen, quite bewildered at finding herself once more clasped in her lover's arms.

"Something wrong with the steamer, so we are delayed six hours, my servant telegraphed just in time. I was nearly mad this morning at leaving you; but I think we have stolen a march on my lady. Darling, I fear she is no friend to us."

"I am afraid not, indeed," replied Helen.

She was recovering herself somewhat, and looked up into Ray's face with a bright, loving smile.

They had wandered off through the little

gate into the pine wood at the back of the house.

The sun was setting, and clothed the sky with a glorious canopy of orange, purple, and gold, whilst the perfumed flowers nodded "good-night" with their drooping heads, as their king sank slowly to his rest. The fragrant air kissed Helen's pale cheek, and lifted the gold-brown curls from her hot brow, whilst the tall, ripe grasses clung lovingly about her feet.

They wandered on under the aromatic pines, which reared their straight, sombre heads to the darkening sky, and filled the air with a strange, sweet smell.

"My darling, what shall I do without your dear presence in that far-off land to which I am going?" exclaimed Ray, passionately. "Tell me that you will be true to me, that no one shall ever come between us."

"Only trust me, Ray; I swear that nothing shall separate us but death."

"Only a year, my little one, and then I

shall claim you. And you will write to me by every mail; the smallest detail in your life will be of interest to me."

"I will write," returned Helen, her voice choked with tears; then suddenly clinging to him: "I am frightened, Ray, ah! do not leave me here, something will happen to you, we shall never again be the same to each other as now. Oh! take me with you."

"Would to Heaven it were possible!" he exclaims, clasping her to him; "you must help me to be brave, Nell, a soldier's wife must learn to bear the fortunes of war."

He speaks resolutely, but his heart is heavy with grief at the thought of leaving her.

The moon had risen, and flooded the woods with amber light, clothing the black sides of the hills with weird shadows, and casting an almost unearthly radiance over the fair face lying on Raymond's breast.

Presently they retraced their steps through the strewn fir needles, to the

garden-gate, and there Ray held the girl he loved in his arms for the last time, held her as though he could never loose his clasp; then, putting her a little away from him, gazed into her eyes with a set despairing look in his own, such a look as one might give to a dear dead face before the grave shuts it away for ever from our tear-dimmed sight.

"Good-bye, my own love. May God keep you until we meet again," he whispers, in a low broken voice, as he rains passionate kisses upon her cheek and lips.

"Oh! do not go—I cannot say Good-bye; stay with me, or take me with you," she cries, with tender entreaty.

He presses her convulsively to his breast, then with something like tears standing in his eyes, he unloosens the grasp of her soft fingers and goes towards the gate.

There, he pauses, and looks at her again, a graceful figure "gown'd in pure white," amidst the dahlias that stand upright and tall in the garden-beds, with a fair quiver-

ing face and out-stretched hands, a figure which will haunt him in his dreams—then he turns—and is lost in the gathering darkness.

She stands for a moment still and motionless, until the sound of his footsteps dies away, then with a low, heart-broken cry, she falls senseless upon the ground.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS CARISFORD SAYS "NO."

"Oh! soft South wind that bloweth,
From where my love repaireth,
Convey a kiss to his dear mouth,
And tell me how he fareth."

THE autumn waned, the hazel-nuts and blackberries were rapidly decreasing under the busy fingers of the village children, and many a bright-plumaged pheasant had closed his glazing eyes upon a happy world, in the fresh smelling furrows of mother Earth.

A month had passed since Raymond Vandeleur's departure.

A month fraught with inexpressible weariness to Helen.

Every hour in the twenty-four brought with it some remembrance of her lover; the waving woods of Monks-Hollow, and the pleasant shady nooks in the old-fashioned

garden of Shafto Court, where so many happy hours had been spent, filled her with an intense longing akin to pain.

"He is gone," was her waking thought; "how shall I ever live through the months that are to separate us?

"If only I could see him for one brief moment, hear the sound of his dear voice, and feel the warm clasp of his hand again in mine, I should be happy?"

"She is getting over it," remarked her mother one day to Sir Felix, as she noticed Helen going through her round of duties with her usual calm demeanour.

But Helen was not one to weep and wail in public; she knew that there would be no mercy for her at Shafto, so she accepted her lot bravely and made the best of it.

"We shall be able to start for Paris very soon," said my lady, "and there, I trust, the cure will be completed. Only give her time and plenty of gaiety and we shall have no more trouble with her. She is too

sensible of her beauty to throw herself away on Raymond Vandeleur!"

Sir Felix shook his head.

"I am not so sure of that; but such a marriage is altogether out of the question; however we shall see."

"I feel so angry with myself for allowing that letter to fall into her hands; however it will be the last," returned my lady, knitting her brow, and looking very determined. Now Lady Shafto generally opened the letter-bag and distributed its contents to the household.

One morning, however, she had been too unwell to leave her room, and Helen, who had been on the look-out for some days for the beloved hand-writing, and watched the advent of the bag with feverish impatience, was alone in the breakfast-room when it was brought in.

"Six letters, two for papa, three for—ah! at last! My darling, I knew you had not forgotten me!" and she pounced upon a thin, foreign-looking epistle, bearing the

Madeira post-mark; hastily concealing it in her dress, she ran upstairs to her room, and, having locked the door, she gave herself up to the intense joy which filled her heart at hearing from him.

"He was well, and enjoying the voyage, with several pleasant companions on board," so he said; "that he would write again directly they reached Durban."

His letter was written evidently in a cheerful spirit, and had the desired effect of making Helen feel much happier.

He told her several amusing anecdotes of his voyage, and seemed bright and hopeful.

She was interrupted before she had finished it by her mother's maid knocking at her door, who said Lady Shafto wished to see her.

"I will come directly, Wilson," replied Helen, pressing the precious document to her lips, and then hiding it inside her dress.

As she entered her mother's room, my lady's eyes scrutinized her sweet, happy face very sharply.

One look was sufficient.

"You have heard from Raymond Vandeleur" with an ominous frown.

"I have," replied Helen, rather haughtily, her cheek paling.

"Let me see the letter; I thought he understood—you also—that I would have no correspondence."

"Do not be angry, mother; he knew I was anxious to hear, and, oh! he is well and——"

"That will do, Helen; I take no interest in his proceedings. Do you intend to show me the letter?"

"No, mamma."

"I suppose you will answer it?" asked my lady, calmly, though a red spot burned on her cheek as she eyed her daughter's somewhat defiant countenance.

"Do you mind?"

"Yes, I strongly object; however, for once, I suppose, I must give way," replied my lady, knowing perfectly well that it would be useless to forbid it.

But the days rolled on, and Helen heard no more of her lover; she knew that the steamer must have arrived at the Cape long since, indeed had seen the announcement of its safe arrival in the "Times," but no letter reached her from Raymond Vandeleur. The faint bloom faded from her cheek, the light from her eyes, her step grew listless, and she drooped so palpably that Lady Shafto grew quite alarmed, and gladly availed herself of an invitation from Lady Redgrave for Helen to spend a week or two at Beech-hurst.

* * * * * *

It is a cool, soft day with a blue, hazy sky, one of those calm days which we have sometimes early in November; not a sound breaks the stillness of the moorland, save the occasional "whirr" of a pheasant, and the sharp "crack" of the guns in the leafy woods which surround the Upland Farm, where Sir Jasper Redgrave and several friends are now shooting.

A white table-cloth is spread on the grass,

and thereon are many tempting delicacies in the shape of cold game, patés, etc., while several gold-necked bottles peeping out of a hamper near show that their part in the performance has not been forgotten.

Lady Redgrave leans on a pile of rugs and cushions, watching Helen Shafto putting finishing touches to the banquet, whilst Evelyn Carisford is busily engaged in mixing a salad with praiseworthy exactitude.

"There, that is done! I only hope it will meet with your approval; I rather flatter myself upon making a salad," says she, as with a final flourish of her spoon and fork, she places the bowl in the centre of the improvised table.

"What a mad-cap you are, Evelyn?" laughs Lady Redgrave. "Come and sit by me until the gentlemen arrive; you must be quite tired. They ought to be here now," looking at her watch.

"What a lovely place this is! I never wish to go abroad again," and her eyes

wander over the wooded expanse of green hill and valley.

"Here they come," exclaims Helen, as four individuals appear over the stile leading into the woods.

"We are all starved; I hope you have brought us plenty to eat," remarks Sir Jasper, sitting down on the grass by Miss Shafto.

"And drink," mildly interpolates Jack Beresford.

"What sport have you had?" asks Lady Redgrave.

"Pretty fair, considering the pheasants are rather wild and Jack is not in form," answers Sir Jasper, cutting up a chicken.

"Spare me, I beg of you," returns Jack Beresford, looking very red, and feeling rather ashamed at his want of skill.

"Do you think you could hit a hay-stack to-day, Jack?" laughs a big, broad-shouldered man, with a frank, honest face, and good teeth.

"Shut up, Ted," rejoins Jack, looking

sulky, as he meets Miss Carisford's eyes fixed upon him rather wickedly.

"Poor boy," says she, "is he then so near-sighted?" with a demure smile, which curls the corners of her red lips so bewitchingly that Edward Beresford falls in love with her on the spot.

"Jack, will you introduce me to Miss Carisford," he says, in a low voice.

"Certainly—a thousand pardons; Miss Carisford, you have often heard me speak of my brother, allow me the felicity of presenting him to you."

"What has he told you about me, Miss Carisford?"

"He gave you a shocking character," replies Evelyn, wickedly; "said you were a dreadful tyrant, and kept everyone in order, even himself."

"Good gracious!" ejaculates Jack, with surprised eyes.

"It would take a cleverer man than I to keep him in order. Jack, you scoundrel, how dare you say such things about me!"

"Miss Carisford, let me recommend to your perusal a certain history of two people for whose sad fate I cherished a most holy awe in my youthful days," says Jack, solemnly.

"Dear me, I should think you had scarcely passed that 'youthful' period," replies Miss Carisford, rather maliciously, knowing full well that Jack's age is his sore point.

"Don't be angry," she continues, softly, "but tell me the names of these interesting people?"

"Ananias and Sapphira!"

Miss Carisford's pretty little nose turns up even more than nature intended it to do, and she vouchsafes no reply to this impertinent speech, but addresses Edward Beresford.

Lady Redgrave laughs:

"How you two squabble, Jack!"

"Our squabbling days are nearly over, *fortunately*," he says, with a sly glance at Evelyn, who however turns a grey tweed

shoulder persistently to him, and chatters away to his brother.

"When do you sail?" asks Colonel Vyvyan.

"This day fortnight."

Helen Shafto gives an unconscious sigh.

"If only I could go too," she thinks; then aloud:

"We are off the first week in December, and shall spend Christmas Day in Paris."

"Sylvia, we shall have to run up to town for a few weeks; this place will be intolerable when all our friends are gone," says Sir Jasper.

"By the bye, when is Caryl coming back?"

"I heard from him the other day," replies Colonel Vyvyan; "he was then at Naples, had invested in a yacht; he intended going to Paris somewhere about January."

"Paris!" exclaims Helen, the faint colour fading from her cheek, as she raises her eyes, and meets Lady Redgrave's kindly glance.

"Come gentlemen," says she gaily, "you

have had nearly an hour for your luncheon, suppose we have a little stroll; and we give you permission to smoke as much as you please."

After this there is a general move.

Evelyn pretends not to see the imploring glances which Jack casts in her direction, and edges herself close to her guardian, who, nothing loth saunters with her into the wood, followed at a respectful distance by her admirer.

They have not gone very far before Sir Jasper calls out:

"Vyvyan, where are you? I wish you would come up to the farm with me."

"All right," replies the Colonel, feeling rather annoyed, as he had been anticipating a pleasant *tête-à-tête* with his ward.

"Pray excuse me, Evy, I must go I suppose. Ah! Jack, come and take care of Miss Carisford until I return," and he vaults over the stile, and joins Sir Jasper.

Evelyn puts on a charming pout, as Jack comes up to her.

He looks extremely penitent she notices under her long black lashes, so she relents, and says reproachfully:

"Are you not ashamed of yourself for being so unkind to me at luncheon?"

"Dreadfully; will you forgive me?"

"I suppose I had better, as *fortunately* I shall not see you much longer," she replies, demurely.

Jack draws a quick breath.

"You know I did not mean it, I hate leaving England."

"Really? I should have thought you would have liked such a thorough change of scene."

"I shall leave my heart in Downshire," says Jack, rather nervously, opening and shutting his cigarette case.

Evelyn gives a little laugh.

"What an old-fashioned person!—I begin to think your youthful days are a long time ago."

"What do you mean?" he returns, sulkily.

"Now-a-days, young men do not generally possess such inconvenient articles as hearts."

"Neither do I, Evelyn, for it is gone."

"Let us return to the others," says she, twisting a piece of heather round her fingers.

"Don't do that, those hands are far too pretty to ill-treat in that way," he returns, taking firm possession of them, in spite of her efforts to release them.

"Evelyn, I love you with my whole heart; tell me, am I mistaken in thinking you care a little bit for me?"

A flush of crimson dyes Evelyn's face, and then recedes, leaving her very pale, as Jack after a moment's pause, continues, hurriedly:

"I am not half good enough for you, Evelyn, but if you will only give me the faintest hope that one day perhaps you will return my love, I shall be so happy!"

Evelyn slowly raises her eyes to his face, and sees such a doleful visage, that she is

seized with a slightly hysterical feeling, and bursts into a long peal of silvery laughter.

Jack starts as though he was shot, and drops her hands.

He is terribly in earnest, and it is no small shock to his feelings to see the object of his adoration in fits of laughter at this supreme moment.

"When you have quite finished, Miss Carisford, perhaps you will tell me the joke. I confess I cannot see it myself. I have been living in a Fools' Paradise for some weeks, but I had no idea that the awakening would be so painful,"

He turns away with a rapid step, but has not gone far before Evelyn feeling bitterly ashamed and miserable, runs after him, and lays a soft little hand upon his arm:

"Jack, forgive me—indeed I am most sorry, but you looked so doleful, I really could not help it;" and she meets the frank, honest blue eyes with something like tears standing in her own.

He presses the little hand passionately to his lips:

"Have you nothing else to tell me, Evy?"

She looks down.

"I like you immensely, Jack, better than I have ever liked anyone, but"—she hesitates painfully—"I cannot give you any hope."

"Do not say that, darling, you tell me you like me better than anyone else, let the matter rest until I return from the Cape; you do not say 'no,' and I am content."

Evelyn considers a moment; his return seems a very long way off: she cannot bear to pain him by a direct refusal, and she is in reality very fond of him, so she looks up brightly, and says:

"Very well, it shall be as you say; only, Jack, suppose in the mean time I see someone I like better."

"Then, my darling, write and tell me so, and if he is a good fellow, I shall do my best to wish you happiness."

His voice trembles as he speaks, and, touched by his generosity, Evelyn returns the pressure of his hand.

As she rides slowly home later on, she does not feel quite satisfied with herself.

"What a coward I am! Why could I not have said 'no,' at once? And yet I like him so much, we got on so well together; and now he has spoilt all our pleasant intercourse by wanting to marry me! I wish I had not laughed; how unkind he must have thought me. What a nuisance it all is!"

She looked grave and sad for a moment, then a bright mischievous smile stole over her face, and touching her horse lightly with the whip she rode in at the Priory gates at a fast trot.

Helen Shafto had been staying at Beechhurst for about a week, and gladly welcomed the change. She was looking sadly pale and weary, as she followed Lady Redgrave into the drawing-room that afternoon where tea was awaiting them.

Seated in an arm-chair near the window, was a stately old lady with silvery curls, and a dignified mien.

"I trust you have not been dull in my absence," said Lady Redgrave to her, "is your head really better? We were all so sorry you had to remain at home to-day."

"My dear, I am quite well, the delightful coolness and quietude of this pretty room has quite cured me. There is no other remedy for these nervous attacks. My child," addressing Helen, who was already a favourite of hers, "you look tired to death."

"Yes, does she not? Nell, you must have a cup of tea, and then I shall send you upstairs, to lie down for an hour," said Lady Redgrave, and she put her arm gently round the girl, and drew her down into an arm-chair.

"Mrs. Beresford, you and Lady Redgrave quite spoil me," laughed Helen, as she drank her tea.

* * * * * *

"This is the pleasantest hour of the day," remarked Lady Redgrave, a little later, as clad in a quilted satin dressing-gown of cerulean hue, she leant back in a cosy low chair, with her pretty feet crossed upon a cushion, in front of her dressing-room fire.

Miss Shafto reclined at her side upon a sofa, with her lovely gold-brown locks rippling their wavy length almost to the ground.

"I am so glad Jack Beresford is staying here," said the latter, not heeding her companion's speech.

"Are you? Why?"

"How foolish you must think me," continued Helen, blushing, and looking rather confused: "I really scarcely knew what I was saying."

"Never mind, do not explain, I know quite well what you mean; it is because he is so soon going to the Cape," said Lady Redgrave, holding up a feather screen to shade her delicate face from the fire. Then, after a slight pause:

"Cannot I help you in this affair, Helen? I have never liked to speak of it to you before—but I can no longer keep silent when I see you looking so pale and unhappy. Dear, cannot anything be done?"

She put out her hand as she spoke, and took Helen's with a tender pressure.

At the sound of her sweet and gentle voice, Helen, whose whole nature felt exhausted and unstrung from the severe self-restraint she had been exerting for the last few weeks, buried her face in the sofa-cushions, and burst into a flood of bitter tears, and Lady Redgrave let her alone, knowing it would ease her heart, only smoothing the russet silken locks with her soft fingers, until after a while Helen's sobs died away, and raising herself from her reclining position, she caught her friend's hand, saying:

"Dear Lady Redgrave, how good you are to me; I feel so ashamed of myself for being so foolish, but I really think it has done me good."

"I daresay. What should we poor women do without a good cry now and then; it clears the atmosphere like a thunderstorm; what a cigar is to a man, tears are to us."

Helen laughed.

"But, Nell, I positively refuse to have anything more to do with you, unless you call me 'Sylvia.' And now tell me all about it, as at present I am utterly in the dark."

"I have been so anxious these last few weeks, for I have not had a line from Raymond; he wrote to me from Madeira, and he promised me another letter directly he landed. The steamer has arrived, but nothing from him. I am sure his letters have miscarried—he has written, I feel certain."

"Poor child! No wonder you are worried. What does your mother think about it?"

"Oh! I forgot you did not know—we are forbidden to write; mamma was very angry about the letter which arrived."

"Oh, indeed!" said her ladyship, screwing up her red lips and looking very wise; "I understand!"

She evidently had her own ideas upon the subject, but could scarcely impart them to Helen, as they were not complimentary to Lady Shafto.

"I daresay you will think me very wrong to wish to carry on this correspondence, as it is so strictly forbidden, but indeed, it is so hard for us both; we have been engaged ever since we were children, and now that he is away, and unhappy, to prevent us writing to one another seems doubly cruel. But you will be quite tired of me and my troubles."

"I will tell you when I am," returned Sylvia, caressingly. "And now, I suppose you have written a letter, and want Jack Beresford to take charge of it for you?"

"How can you guess that?" asked Helen, wonderingly.

"Because I am a witch; I have an idea of what you suffer, and I am going to help

you. Very shocking, is it not, to encourage such disobedience? but I trust I may be forgiven. Is your letter ready?"

"No, I have to add a few more lines, and intend giving it to Jack to-night; he leaves here for Aldershot to-morrow, does he not?"

"Yes. Nell, when your letter is written, I want you to enclose a few lines from me; do not look so surprised, you will know all about it one day. And now, my dear, you really must run away, and I will send Louise to coil up those lovely tresses. And, Nell, try to look your bright, happy self to-night at dinner", and she held the girl for an instant in her arms in a loving embrace.

"How can I ever thank you, dear," said Helen, as she kissed her.

"Do not try to, Nell, only be brave, and it will all come right."

And then Helen went away feeling much relieved, but decidedly puzzled. But one thought pervaded her mind: "Did Sylvia think her mother had stopped the letters?"

She was still wondering about it, when she was interrupted by the entrance of Louise, whose deft fingers soon plaited her silken locks round her shapely little head.

"You look better already," remarked Sylvia, with a bright smile, as she made room for her on the sofa before dinner, "and that pearl-grey dress suits you perfectly."

"You are the doctor, Sylvia," laughed Helen.

The load of grief and anxiety which had so lately pressed her seemed lifted from her heart, and she entered into the familiar chit-chat of the dinner-table with almost her old gaiety and brightness.

Jack Beresford was the only one who looked at all down-cast, but he soon recovered himself, and replied to some of Sylvia's sallies with his usual repartee.

After dinner, Lady Redgrave brought a small note to Helen, to enclose in her own to Raymond Vandeleur, and after sealing it the latter sauntered into the perfumy

depths of the conservatory, and sank into a pile of cushions ranged round the mossy bank which bordered the fountain, where Jack joined her.

"Jack, I have a special favour to ask you to-night," she began, playing rather nervously with her fan.

"I shall be only too pleased to do anything for you, Miss Shafto."

"Will you take charge of a packet for Raymond Vandeleur for me?"

"Certainly—is there any message with it?" said he, laughing, as he took the bulky epistle, and placed it in his note-case.

Helen shook her head, and blushed slightly.

"You will take great care of it, will you not?" she asked, anxiously.

"Fair ladye, I will guard it with my life!" he replied.

She held out her slender white hand, and he took it in his, and bending down brushed it with his fair moustache.

"Thank you so much, Jack, you are doing me a great service."

As he drove away the next day, after taking leave of Evelyn Carisford at the Priory (his honest heart filled with pain at the thought of the many miles that would shortly separate them), a satin embroidered note-case worked for him by his fair enslaver lay next his heart.

He felt, in spite of this precious gift, sad and lonely—her refusal to his immediate suit had wounded him deeply. Still he knew that he had good reason to hope for better luck.

"If only she could have loved me, my little darling, I would have made her so happy," he thought, as he gave his horse a sharp flick with the whip.

Evelyn Carisford certainly may have a far cleverer and more brilliant lover, but she will scarcely be offered a truer, purer, tenderer love than that which she has refused to-day!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WRONG PRINCE.

IT is New Year's Day in Paris.

Paris, that Queen of cities, though now shorn of half her glory, on that day, above all others, overflowing with laughter, mirth and joyousness.

A perfect day, with a fresh crisp air and an Italian sky.

The crowd rolls up and down the broad boulevards, and laughter-loving students and black-eyed grisettes, with snowy caps, and gold crosses on their full bosoms, flock gaily to the Champs Elysées, under whose still leafless trees are Punchinello, a whole army of merry-go-rounds, and other amusements, for the easily-pleased populace.

The wide avenue to the Arc de Triomphe is thick with carriages filled with dainty

Parisian dames, pretty English women, and lovely Americans.

One carriage in particular, a low victoria with a pair of thoroughly-bred black horses, with Russian harness, attracted universal admiration.

Its occupants were a handsome dark-eyed woman clad in claret-coloured velvet and priceless black sable; and her companion was Helen Shafto.

Helen, looking lovelier than ever, with a warm colour on her cheeks, and her violet eyes sparkling with pleasure at the novel scene around her.

A knot of men lounging under the trees had been criticising her for some time.

"I wonder who she is? Princess Zoltikoff is very brave to take up such a beauty. By George! she's perfect!" and the speaker, an Englishman, raised his eyeglass for another look.

"I believe I have met her before, but being away from London last season, I'm rather out of it. However, we are sure to

meet her at the Princess's ball to-night. Here comes de Lancy, he is sure to know all about her. Can you tell us the name of the new beauty, de Lancy?" addressing a dapper little Frenchman.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* is she not *ravissante*, charming!" exclaimed de Lancy, in a wonderful mixture of French and English—"her name I have but just learned, she is a Miss Shafto, staying at the Hotel Bristol. Caryl, who has but just left me, is acquainted with her, and has promised me an introduction to-night. So you see, *mon ami*, I am in luck," and the little man twirled his waxed moustache airily, and looked as important as his short stature would allow.

"Of course," returned his friend, "I remember her; she was introduced last season, and made a great sensation."

"Caryl had not an idea that she was here until a moment since, when he rushed off like a mad-man, and left me to join you," said de Lancy, who was exceedingly

proud of his English, and spoke it on every possible occasion.

"Where is he now?"

"I know not. Bah! he is in love, I do think. There, the carriage stops, let us go and speak to the Princess."

The little man stepped off to the rails, followed by his friends, who were all acquainted with her.

She received them graciously, and introduced them to Helen.

"You have spent but a few days in Paris, mademoiselle?" said de Lancy, with his head on one side, and a fascinating smile, which amused Helen.

"Only three days; we were a week in Brussels," replied she.

"I was sure of it, it would have been impossible for mademoiselle to have been longer here without us knowing it," and he laid his hand on his heart with a low bow.

Helen felt a strong inclination to laugh, but she smiled instead, showing an enchanting dimple at the corner of her lovely

mouth, which quite subjugated de Lancy, who had no eyes, or ears, for anything else for the remainder of the day. He raved about "La belle Anglaise" at the club, and informed Caryl, when he next met him, that he intended to lay his heart and fortune at her feet, much to Caryl's amusement.

Philip had been in Paris for some time, but had no idea that the Shaftos had already arrived, until Helen's beautiful face had passed him on the Boulevards.

She had not seen him, and so was not aware of his presence in Paris.

Hastily leaving de Lancy, after ascertaining her hotel, he took his way thither, and having enquired for Lady Shafto, found she was out. He did not leave his card, but went on to the Boulevards, where he invested in an exquisite satin-lined casket of bon-bons, and then to the florist, where he ordered a bouquet, both to be sent to Miss Shafto.

His heart beat high with pleasurable anticipation at meeting her again, never

had she seemed fairer or sweeter to his envious eyes than to-day.

Helen's acquaintance with the Princess Zoltikoff had commenced in town last season, where they had been mutually attracted, and they were both glad to renew their friendship, the Princess thinking it rather added to her own *éclat*, to be the occasional chaperone of the bright young English beauty.

That night she was giving a grand ball at her mansion in the Champs Elysées, and was anticipating a great deal of amusement at the *fureur* which she was determined should be caused by the *début* of her young friend into French society. She was herself too lovely to feel the least jealous of Helen, the latter serving to heighten the effect of her own dark beauty.

When Helen returned to the hotel after her drive, she found the satin casket.

"Who can have sent?" she thought, and rang the bell to make enquiries, but could obtain no information as to the donor. It

had been brought by a porter, who had several other parcels with him, and there was no message for mademoiselle.

So Helen took it into her mother's room, and showed it to her.

"Is it not strange, mother? Do you know anything about it? Is it not lovely! I wonder who could have sent it!"

Lady Shafto admired it greatly, but whilst eating a bon-bon, a sudden thought flashed across her:

"No doubt he is in Paris, and has found us out;" but she said nothing of this to her daughter.

She resumed her book, and Helen leant back idly in a low chair, and gazed out of the window.

It was getting dark, and, lulled by the warmth of the room, and the heavy perfume of the flowers on the mantel-shelf and tables, she fell fast asleep.

She was awakened presently by the entrance of the waiter with lights, and in his hand a wooden box, which he brought to her.

"More *étrennes*, Helen!" exclaimed my lady. "I wonder who the good fairy can be. This grows mysterious."

Helen quickly removed the lid, and discovered a splendid bouquet of fragrant dewy violets, waxen stephanotis, and yellow roses, besides which, were sprays of the same for the hair and bosom.

"Can it be from that ridiculous M. de Lancy?" laughed Helen, getting a little excited. "Mother, it must be from him; too bad of the Princess to betray my secret, do you see these flowers match my dress for to-night? How tiresome of him," sighed she.

"Nonsense, child, why should he not send you flowers?" said my lady who, however, had her ideas on the subject.

Helen carried away her gift to her own room, and found her maid lighting the candles on the dressing-table.

"Here is a letter for you, Miss Helen," said the old woman; she had been her nurse, and there was no small amount of

affection between her and her young lady.

Helen's heart stood still until she looked at the bulky letter and recognised Lady Redgrave's handwriting.

A heavy sigh broke from her lips as she thought: "When shall I hear from him? —will he never write to me again?"

When she was alone she broke the seal.

There was another letter enclosed, a thick packet indeed, addressed to herself, and when Helen's eyes lighted on the writing, which was Vandeleur's, she sank down into a chair, and fairly cried with delight.

It was a long letter—a kind of diary—telling her of all his doings, every line breathing of love and devotion to her.

"I cannot understand how it is you have not received my letters; I have written by every mail, and can only suppose they have been stopped by Lady Shafto. However, thanks to Lady Redgrave, we shall now be able to obviate this

great difficulty," he wrote. "Only, my darling, let nothing come between us, we must never doubt each other. Jack has just arrived with your precious letter," and so on; at the end he said: "Things are looking very serious here, and I think we shall come to close quarters with these black devils before long; but I can meet with no harm, my darling, while your dear face lies upon my heart, in that pretty velvet case."

Helen read it over and over again, then put it carefully away and turned to Lady Redgrave's letter. Sylvia had evidently been prepared for Lady Shafto's far-seeing eye, which was fortunate, and she had written Helen a pleasant, chatty little note, not once mentioning the enclosure, for which caution Helen mentally blessed her.

"So you have had a letter from Lady Redgrave, my dear," remarked her mother, when she descended to dinner.

"Yes, mother, would you care to read

it? There is plenty of news in it," replied Helen, gaily. "They, the Colonel and Evelyn, are staying with the Beresfords."

Helen seemed a new creature that evening; she chatted away during dinner, and was specially loving to her father, for whom she had always had a deep affection.

He had aged greatly during the past few months, and seemed terribly depressed and irritable.

Now that she felt so much happier, her conscience rather smote her as she remembered how neglectful she had lately been in many little acts of love and attention to him.

She thought her grief had made her somewhat selfish.

"Poor papa! he seems ill and unhappy, I must do my best now to cheer him up."

And Sir Felix stared at his lovely daughter, and wondered what had happened to rouse her from the cold lethargic manner, which had become habitual to her of late, into her present gay mood.

"I suppose it is the prospect of the ball to-night which makes you so merry, Nell, and the thought of that dress, which the Princess confided to me this morning would be one of Worth's happiest inspirations."

"Did she really, papa? How kind she is to take so much trouble about me and my appearance!"

"You are sure to do her justice, my dear," said my lady, sweetly.

Helen's heart beat high with pleasure as she entered the splendid rooms belonging to the Princess Zoltikoff, leaning on her father's arm. Raymond's letter had raised such a weight of anxiety and sorrow from her breast that, for almost the first time since his departure, she was her own bright self.

Happiness lent a tender flush to her fair cheek, a smile to her pretty mouth; and in her dress of white vaporous tulle, with here and there a gleam of snowy satin, and fringes of shaded violets with dew-drops glistening on their odorous leaves, and her

lovely flowers in the russet waves of hair surmounting her pure brow, she looked a picture of beauty.

The Princess welcomed her cordially, and congratulated her, smilingly, upon her appearance:

"You will make no end of conquests to-night, *ma mie.* Worth has indeed surpassed himself.

And the Princess was not far wrong, for before Helen had made a tour of the rooms where all the *crême* of French society, and the loveliest women of the time were assembled, everyone was asking the name of the English beauty, and the Princess was besieged for an introduction.

Philip Caryl, leaning against a *portière*, which separated the dancing rooms, watched her, with a smile of mingled triumph and admiration curling his thin lips.

"She shall one day be mine," he thought, and at that moment she looked up and their eyes met--hers with an expression of utter fear at sight of him Her lovely colour

faded from her cheek, and she left her partner's last speech unanswered, as Philip hastily crossed the room and took her hand.

"How glad I am to see you again, Helen! I hope you have a dance left for me?"

"I think I can manage to give you one," recovering herself a little; "but you will have to wait till rather late I am afraid," looking at her card.

"Let me have this one," replied he, hurriedly, scribbling his name over some illegible hieroglyphics.

"What a shame!" said Helen, smiling. "I believe he is an ambassador, and I should like to dance with him; what will he say!"

"Nothing to you; I shall be called out, and to-morrow you will hear of a fearful tragedy in the Bois," and with a low bow Philip returned her card and left her, making his way to Lady Shafto, who was unfeignedly glad to see him, and in whom he felt he had a firm ally.

"At last this is my dance," said he, as the band played the opening bars of a dreamy German valse, and he passed his arm round Helen and drew her into the ring of dancers.

"Philip, your dancing is perfect," she said, as they floated round the room.

His dark cheek flushed, and he answered, laughing:

"Thanks, sweet lady; you would inspire a Caliban!"

The touch of her small hand, of her slender, supple form encircled by his arm, thrilled him with happiness, and he would have given well nigh all he possessed to press his lips to those scented golden locks which almost brushed his cheek.

The dance over, he led the way to a vast conservatory fitted with a forest of palms and foreign orchids, which filled the air with their sensuous perfume, whilst the cool splash of a fountain falling through masses of ferns and great blocks of ice, alone broke the silence, and the hum

of the festive throng, and the clang of instruments, seemed far away.

"How deliciously cool this is!" exclaimed Helen, with a slight yawn, as she seated herself under a giant magnolia, whose waxen cup-like blooms gleamed out amongst the dark-green foliage.

"I am quite tired, and shall not dance any more."

"Would you like to take a nap? I will watch over you. You may imagine yourself the 'Sleeping Beauty in the Wood,' for really this place is like a wilderness "—(a moment's pause)—"and I will be the 'Prince.'"

"You would be the wrong one," returned Helen, sadly. "I must wait a long time before my Prince comes."

Philip bit his lip angrily, for he knew he had made a false step.

"I did not know there was any Prince to come now," he cried, with a bitter laugh.

Helen turned her head, and their eyes

met in the dim light shed by the Chinese lamps.

"You seem to have a wondrously short memory, Philip," said she, coldly.

"Helen, forgive me," and he caught her hand; "pray, think no more of my silly speech."

She drew her hand from his eager clasp, saying:

"We will return to the ball-room."

Lady Shafto watched them leave the conservatory, and hastened to her daughter.

"You look tired, my dear; had we not better leave?—it is very late. Philip, may I trouble you to order our carriage."

After a few minutes' delay, during which Sir Felix was hunted up from the card-room, the carriage was found.

"Am I forgiven?" Philip whispered, as he gave his arm to Helen, and they stood together for a second in the court-yard, amidst a crowd of flunkeys, link-men, and carriages.

"On condition that you never do so

any more," replied she, with a grave smile, feeling that perhaps she may have been a little hard on him.

After she had driven off he did not return to the ball-room, but getting into his top-coat, and lighting a cigar, paced up and down the Rue de Rivoli, for at least an hour.

"And so I am the wrong Prince," he muttered with an oath, as he flung away the end of his Cabana, and prepared to enter his hotel; "time works wonders, my little beauty—we shall see!"

CHAPTER XX.

LISTENERS HEAR NO GOOD OF THEMSELVES.

SIR JASPER and Lady Redgrave had been spending a very pleasant fortnight with Mrs. Beresford in Warwickshire.

Edward Beresford made a capital host, being blessed with an unfailing good temper, a large amount of unselfishnsss, and a boundless supply of good spirits.

The gentlemen hunted three days a week and were generally accompanied by one or two of the ladies staying at the Hall.

Evelyn Carisford, who was under the chaperonage of Lady Redgrave, had been out with them several times, and rode with great nerve and pluck, much to Edward Beresford's admiration, her light supple little figure displayed to the greatest advantage by her perfectly cut habit.

The evenings were generally devoted to music and dancing; cards and billiards for those who pleased.

It is six o'clock; without, a cold misty rain blurrs the landscape; within, a roaring wood fire blazes in the huge fire-place of the hall. At the end is a billiard table; a handsome Turkey carpet covers the centre of the black oak floor, whilst splendid skin rugs are heaped upon the sofas and ottomans. There are quaint Japanese vases and screens in the corners of the apartment, and lamps covered with rose shades, and supported by curious stuffed birds, shed a softened light over the whole.

The tea-table is drawn up to the fire, and the laughter and chit-chat of about a dozen people is accompanied by the hissing of the silver tea-kettle, and the tinkling of tea-spoons.

Edward Beresford stands beside his mother, relating to a group of auditors his account of the day's hunting. He is

splashed and tired, for he has just come in, but his "pink" suits him.

Evelyn has not been out to-day, and looks up at him rather admiringly.

He is tall and broad, and, like most small women, she admires big men.

"What time do the 'tableaux' commence, Mr. Beresford?" asks a pretty widow, leaning back in her low chair, and playing with a feather screen with which she is shading her *mignonne* face from the fire.

"Nine o'clock, I believe, Mrs. Carlisle; but you must ask Lady Redgrave, she is the master, or rather mistress of the ceremonies," replies Mr. Beresford with a smile, as he turns to Lady Redgrave, who is listening to her husband discussing "coverts" with Major Carew.

"You must come back with us to Beechhurst, and I'll show you what I mean," says Sir Jasper, getting rather excited.

The Major glances at Sylvia, but she does not return it, only the fire-light seems to shed a faint pink tinge to her cheek.

She rises slowly, and turning to Mrs. Beresford, who sits in a large arm-chair by the fire, knitting, says with her gentle smile:

"I am going to Flo—Mrs. Beresford, will you excuse me?"

"Certainly, my dear—I shall come and pay him a visit before I dress!"

Sylvia ran upstairs to a room which adjoined her own, and had been converted into a temporary nursery for the child, who welcomed his mother most energetically.

"Papa got pretty red coat; Flo must have one too, mamma."

"Yes, my darling, you shall, when you are a big man, like papa."

"That will be so long, mummy, Flo won't care about it then."

Sylvia gave an unconscious sigh as she looked down at her boy's fair face.

How many of us can vouch for the truth of the French proverb?—"*Tout vient à point à qui sait attendre!*"

To those who can, how many are disappointed when it comes!

The object so long desired, so earnestly prayed for, does it not often turn to ashes in our eager grasp?—or it comes too late, when we are too old, or too weary—to enjoy what would have given us Heaven in our youth.

All these thoughts flitted through Sylvia's mind as she sat in the cozy nursery with her boy on her knee, telling him fairy stories, until the dressing-bell sent her away to her room.

She remembered having left a book she was reading in Mrs. Beresford's morning-room, which was shut off from the drawing-room by heavy velvet *portières*, so ran down in search of it.

As she looked about the various tables, she could not avoid hearing a low-toned conversation in the adjoining apartment. "Mrs. Carlisle talking scandal, as usual," thought she, moving noiselessly about the room.

Presently she heard her own name, and stood rooted to the spot, whilst anger

and disgust flitted over her beautiful face.

"She flirts disgracefully with Major Carew," said Mrs. Carlisle. "What he can see in her I cannot say. Pretty figure—passably good eyes—but no colouring. I hate those white-faced women."

Mrs. Carlisle's cheek bloomed like a rose, and ill-natured people charitably averred it was not due to nature.

"Did you hear Sir Jasper invite him to Beech-hurst, at tea?" enquired one of her auditors, a flighty young thing of thirty-five or so, who had had her eye upon the Major for some time as a possible *parti*, and by whom she was always calmly ignored. "He has been staying down there a long time this autumn, I quite wonder at Sir Jasper inviting him again so soon."

"Well, she is quite welcome to flirt with the Major if it please her, he is not at all my style," replied Mrs. Carlisle, laughing.

Lady Redgrave waited to hear no more, but fled upstairs to her room.

She felt utterly bewildered at what she had heard.

"Was it possible," she thought, "that anyone could accuse her of flirting?—with such an old friend, too. Certainly he was rather devoted to her, but that was nothing. How many men she knew who were all devoted to married women, and yet the world thought none the worse of them for it!"

But Sylvia was not a fast or a frisky matron. She had never indulged in numberless flirtations as so many women do now-a-days. She had always had plenty of admiration, and a few sincere friends, but among the generality of men she was considered cold, and proud.

Perhaps if she had had several as devoted admirers as the Major, society would have said nothing, but the fact of having only one, was sufficient to set afloat a whole river of scandal.

Provided a woman changes her lovers as often as she does her gloves, Mrs. Grundy will take little notice of her, beyond a shrug

of the shoulders, and a smile of contempt; but let her be guilty of fidelity to one, and society will do its best to kill her reputation.

Sylvia thought it all out as she sat by her fire, and determined the scandal should be stopped at once.

But how? To appeal to the Major would be to betray herself, and was therefore impossible; but she could prevent him coming to Beech-hurst by speaking to her husband, and though this proceeding was exceedingly distasteful to her, she felt there was no alternative.

"It seems great nonsense," she thought, "to deprive myself of his society, through the idle gossip of a spiteful woman like Mrs. Carlisle, who, I know, cuts up all her friends indiscriminately; and yet, perhaps, our pleasant friendship had better come to an end; but it is very hard," and she sighed heavily as she rose and rang the bell for her maid.

She dressed quickly, and went into her

husband's dressing-room, much to his astonishment.

He was exercising upon his cranium with two huge ivory brushes, and suspended his occupation for a second as she entered.

"Hullo! anything wrong?"

"No; I only wanted to ask you if Major Carew is returning with us to Beechhurst?" replied Sylvia, rather nervously.

"Why, have you any objection?"

"Not exactly; but do you not think he has stayed with us long enough—you know he came to us for a fortnight after he left his cousin?"

"And why the d—l shouldn't he come if I choose to invite him?" replied Sir Jasper, with an ugly smile curving his thin lips, as he turned slowly round and confronted his wife, who fidgeted with her bracelets and looked uncomfortable.

Sir Jasper laughed softly.

"Perhaps it is a case of '*On revient toujours à ses premiers amours*,' eh?"

"Nothing of the kind," exclaimed

Sylvia, turning crimson; "I think he has stayed with us long enough, that is all. He has not accepted has he?"

"No; he thinks he ought to go to some relation in Dorsetshire."

"Then do not press him."

"May I be permitted to ask whether this wonderful piece of forbearance on your part is for your sake or his?" enquired Sir Jasper, with a sneer.

Lady Redgrave's lip quivered, but she did not reply.

"If you are afraid of the Major falling in love with you, I think him quite capable of taking care of himself; and as to you," with a shrug of contempt, "you have not sufficient heart to let it overbalance your head."

"Thanks for the compliment; but if people talk——?" said Sylvia, her dark eyes flashing.

"Let them! if I do not care, neither need you. And now, perhaps, you will have the kindness to go, or I shall be late;"

then *sotto voce:* "D—n the women; they always have some insane idea in their heads to plague a man about!"

Lady Redgrave waited for no more, but swept out of the room, feeling she had done more harm than good by her interference! Still, like most people, in proportion to the opposition she met with, so all the more was she determined to prevent the Major from coming to Beech-hurst. For some days past Edward Beresford and his younger guests had been working most energetically at *tableaux vivants*, and he expected several of the county people to dinner that night to witness them.

The stage had been erected in the library, and thither they all assembled soon after nine o'clock.

No expense or trouble had been spared on the dresses and accessories, and the result was perfection. The *tableaux* were taken chiefly from Tennyson's poems, and commenced with the "Golden Supper," where *Julian* gives *Camilla* back to her

husband. Mrs. Carlisle represented *Camilla* and looked lovely:

> "On her head
> A diamond circlet, and from under this
> A veil that seemed no more than gilded air,
> Flying by each fine ear an Eastern gauze
> With seeds of gold."

Edward Beresford was *Lionel* and admirably pourtrayed the fear, delight and amazement with which he is supposed to have beheld what he believed to be the "wraith" of his wife. Major Carew was *Julian*, but, as he had a great antipathy to Mrs. Carlisle, he could scarcely be congratulated upon the accuracy of his representation. There was none of the calm despair, blent with holy resignation, which must have shadowed *Julian's* face as he watched *Camilla* stepping past her picture.

However, the audience was not disposed to be critical, and the curtain fell amidst great applause. The next was from "Dora," and here little Flo came in and performed his part with wonderful gravity.

Very sweet he looked, in a hat wreathed with poppies and corn-flowers, and his golden curls tossed in picturesque disorder over his broad white brow, as he gazed with fear and amazement at his stern grandfather, who demands of *Dora* with angry surprise:

"Whose child is that?"

Lady Redgrave, as *Dora*, was charming in a dark green dress of coarse stuff, looped over a crimson petticoat, a white kerchief folded over the open bodice, and a large straw hat on the back of her head trimmed with wild flowers.

Her large dark eyes were full of tender pleading, and her right hand enfolded the child, whilst the other was held out deprecatingly to the old man.

Several other *tableaux* followed, but the last was universally pronounced as the prettiest, and the most effective of the whole.

It was the "Sleeping Beauty;" Lady Redgrave represented the *Princess*, and Major Carew the *Prince*.

Evelyn Carisford and Edward Beresford slipped round to the front to witness it as the curtain rose, for they felt sure it would meet with unqualified admiration.

"It is more lovely than I thought it possible to be," she whispered.

The scene was the sleeping apartment of the *Princess*, who was lying on a low couch covered with the richest eastern embroidery.

She wore a sweeping white satin dress, whose billowy folds lay in sheeny masses on the floor, whilst luxuriant curls of ebon hue fall,

> "On either side her tranced form
> Forth streaming from a braid of pearl."

One softly rounded white arm is thrown lightly across the "silk star-broider'd coverlid," whilst the other "upswells the gold-fringed pillow lightly prest."

The lime-light falls upon her lovely face, and catching the soft curve of the long, dark eye-lashes gives a most sweet expression to it.

There are several attendants asleep in

various attitudes in the back-ground, and bending over her, with love and admiration illumining his dark face, was the *Prince* in a handsome dress of Oriental design, and covered with jewels.

This *tableau* was received with great enthusiasm and had to be repeated, as was also one in which Miss Carisford took part, as the *Beggar Maid* to Mr. Beresford's *King Cophetua.*

After the *tableaux*, the company adjourned to the hall and dancing commenced.

"Sir Jasper has asked me to return to Beech-hurst to-morrow," remarked George Carew to Sylvia, as they stood together in the deep embrasure of one of the windows.

"I heard him," she replied, rather coldly.

"What shall I do?" he asked, softly, bending down till his thick black moustache almost brushed her shoulder.

"Tell me, shall I accept his invitation, or go to Dorsetshire?"

"Do you really wish me to say?" edging away from him a little.

"Yes."

"Then, go to Dorsetshire," replied she, unfalteringly.

There was a moment's pause, then with an effort she raised her eyes and looked at him steadily and gravely.

His own gazed into hers with a strong pleading in their brown depths, then a quiver passed over his bronzed face, and he said in a low voice:

"It shall be as you like, I will go."

"Thank you," she replied, simply, as he offered her his arm and they again joined the dancers.

The next morning, when Sir Jasper reminded him of his invitation he said, laughing

"I have had a letter from my uncle in Dorsetshire, who threatens to cut me off with a shilling if I do not run down to see him at once, and as I really cannot afford to offend him in these hard times, I have no alternative but to go.

Sir Jasper looked sharply at his wife, but she was gazing abstractedly out of the window, and did not seem to hear the remark.

Only deep in her heart she thought:

"I have done right, and I repent already."

Mrs. Carlisle also heard it, and whispered to her particular friend and confidante:

"That is artfully done, my dear, but it will not take me in; it is only a blind."

So much for poor Sylvia's praiseworthy attempt to kill scandal.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNWELCOME PROPOSAL.

IT is the second week in February, and the Shaftos are still in Paris.

Philip Caryl is a constant visitor at their hotel, and Helen cannot but acknowledge that his presence is very welcome at times when Sir Felix is absent, and she is left *tête-à-tête* with her mother, which she dreads, being constantly fearful of the subject of her engagement, and Philip's increasing attention being broached.

He is always on the alert to do her a service; always ready to accompany her anywhere she wishes to go.

"I believe he would take me to the Morgue, if I asked him," she remarked, half-angrily, to her mother, one morning.

"Helen, I am disgusted with you, as if

Philip would think of taking you to such a dreadful place," replied my lady, severely.

And yet all his attentions were offered so unobtrusively, that she could not avoid or take offence at them.

One fine frosty morning, Philip and Helen mounted their horses, and rode off to the Bois; they were to meet Sir Felix and Lady Shafto at the cascade, and lunch there.

Helen looked well and happy; she was very fond of riding, and the exercise in the cold air brought a bright colour to her cheek and a light to her dreamy eyes.

They halted at the *chalêt* and leaving their horses, walked up to the cascade, where Philip found a sheltered nook, and they sat down.

The sun sparkled on the clear water as it fell foaming into the rocky basin beneath, and the spray flew up in prismatic clouds at Helen's feet.

"Half an hour to luncheon," remarked

Philip, looking at his watch, "I am getting quite hungry. By-the-bye, I have those tickets for to-night; and I heard you say you should like to hear Patti."

"How kind of you, Philip; it will indeed be a treat," exclaimed Helen, looking pleased. "I had a letter from Evelyn Carisford this morning; she says everyone is wondering when you are going home—you are wanted badly, the tenants do not like the new bailiff, and complain dreadfully of him."

"Ah! they had too much their own way under old Gibbons, who was too lazy to look after them," returned Philip, with a careless laugh. "Do not talk of going home, Helen, I hate the idea of it. I shall feel an usurper there, ever since it came into my possession I have felt wretched about it," he continued, sadly, but with a side glance at his companion, which rather belied his manner.

Helen looked up at him with a sympathetic gleam in her soft eyes:

"Poor Philip—it is indeed very sad for you; but you are not to blame, if any one is it is Sir Robert."

Philip winced:

"Helen," he said, his voice growing husky, and his dark face turning a shade paler, "I will return to Monks-Hollow for one reason only, because you ask me; but will you not come too? Nay, for God's sake do not look at me like that—you must know how truly, how madly I love you. Only tell me that I am not utterly odious in your eyes." As he spoke, he seized her hands, but she tore them from his impassioned clasp, and her form quivering with anger, she sprang to her feet:

"Silence! how dare you speak to me like this. You know I am engaged to your cousin."

"Lady Shafto assured me yesterday that everything is at an end between you and Raymond," replied Philip, looking extremely subdued, as he leant against a tree, and gnawed his moustache.

"My mother has told you what is false," said Helen, in clear, scornful tones, "my engagement with Raymond Vandeleur has never been broken—if he were still the heir to Monks-Hollow my mother would have no objection to the match, but as you are that fortunate person, she wishes me to transfer my affections to you, I presume. I can only say, that I regret it is quite out of my power to do so. You can tell my lady, Philip Caryl, that I have declined your offer, and that I am still bound heart and soul to your cousin."

After this decided speech Miss Shafto gathered up her skirt, and walked over to the *chalêt*, where she found her mother and Sir Felix, who had just arrived.

Helen was too disturbed to do justice to the delicate repast ordered for them, and her flushed cheeks and agitated manner did not escape notice, my lady mentally determining to "have it out" with her refractory daughter on their return home.

Philip, too, looked ill at ease, and some-

what sulky. He was feeling very angry with himself for being betrayed into speaking by Helen's soft and gentle manner. He felt convinced that she would never care for him.

"I will make her, she shall love me," he thought, and then sighed at the utter hopelessness of the threat.

"I shall return in the carriage, mother, I am tired," said Helen, as the gentlemen strolled outside with their cigars.

"You will do nothing of the kind, Helen; I beg that you ride as you came," replied my lady, quietly.

Helen shot a defiant look under her dark lashes, but said nothing.

She rode back with Philip, and scarcely a word was spoken by either until she dismounted, when she said, coolly:

"I suppose you are not coming in?"

"If you do not mind, I should like to speak to you for one minute," returned he, humbly; "do let me come up."

Without a word she turned and led the way upstairs, he following.

The afternoon was drawing in, and the firelight flickered pleasantly over the velvet tables and chairs, and odds and ends of priceless china which Lady Shafto collected about her, and illumined Helen's fair face as she leant against the point-lace-adorned mantel-shelf.

He came and stood close to her, and looked down at her with sad, and despairing eyes.

"Helen, I cannot bear that our pleasant intercourse should come to an end through what happened this morning. Tell me you forgive me."

Helen had been feeling rather sorry for her hasty words, during her long ride home, and held out her hand to him with a frank, sweet smile, saying:

"Let us forget it, Philip, only, it is a forbidden subject henceforth.

He bent down, and pressed his lips to the little white hand, an action which clouded her face again, and she hastily disengaged herself.

"I suppose you dine here before the Opera?"

And he, having assented, gathered up his hat and whip and departed.

* * * * * *

A brilliant house had assembled that night to witness the performance of "Faust," and as Helen took her seat in the box procured by Philip, she seemed quite herself again.

Lady Shafto, seeing that she and Philip appeared pretty good friends, wisely determined to ignore the events of the morning, feeling certain that if Philip had proposed, she would hear of it from him sooner or later.

At the end of the first act several of Helen's admirers came in, and among them M. de Lancy, who was as voluble as ever, and quite overwhelmed her with compliments.

"Mademoiselle is somewhat *distraite* to-night," he whispered, bending over her until his waxed and pointed moustache almost touched her cheek.

"I am tired," she replied, coldly, as she swept the glittering house with her glass, and nodded gaily to the Princess Zoltikoff opposite.

"Madame asked me to escort you to her box, mademoiselle; will you permit me to do so now?" asked de Lancy.

"I should like to go immensely," replied Helen, looking at my lady, who at once assented, so, taking de Lancy's arm, she passed out along the corridor to the other side of the house. The Princess welcomed her with effusion; she was looking radiant, lying back indolently in her velvet chair, sparkling with jewels, and surrounded as usual by a knot of moustached and *decoré* heroes, rendering one happy with a tender glance of her languid, dark eyes, and replying to the complimentary speeches of another with all the *espièglerie* and fascination which had brought so many of the sterner sex to her feet.

"How I wish she would charm Philip,"

thought Helen, as she seated herself by her illustrious friend.

"What think you of Patti to-night?" remarked the Princess, in her pretty foreign English, which she insisted on speaking upon every opportunity.

"Is she not *ravissante*, charming? M. Lavigne has brought me this lovely bouquet to throw to her in the last act,' she continued with an arch glance upwards at a tall, distinguished-looking man, covered with orders, who sat on her left hand.

He gnawed his moustache, and replied hastily:

"Madame can do as she likes with the flowers."

"*Merci, mon ami*," returned the Princess, a wicked smile curling her rich red lips as she looked down at her bouquet, which was composed of the rarest exotics; "you could not wish your flowers a better fate than to be thrown at La Patti's feet. But I have not quite made up my mind,

perhaps, after all, I shall keep them myself." She shot a soft glance from under her long lashes, and M. Lavigne's grave face brightened into a smile.

"But, *ma belle Hélène*, why did you not bring that handsome cousin of yours with you?" asked she, turning to Helen.

"I did not know you wished to see him, madame; perhaps he will pay you a visit after the next act."

"When am I to congratulate you?" asked the Princess, behind her large, black and gold fan.

Helen's face crimsoned as she replied, hastily:

"Never."

"Nonsense; I heard to-day that it was quite settled and the marriage to come off very shortly."

"There is no truth in it."

"*Mais, pourquoi?* Surely you can like him, he is rich, ah, *mon Dieu!* how rich! and he is *très comme il faut.* I fear there is another in your heart, *ma mie.*"

"Pray say no more," said Helen, in distress. "Indeed I am not engaged to him, and he is not my cousin, only an old friend. Will you contradict this report whenever you hear it."

The Princess laughed good-humouredly and shrugged her perfect shoulders as she replied:

"I will do whatever you wish, but you English women are so foolish over these matters. When you have been married six months what does it matter whether you have been what you call in love with your husband or not?"

Helen laughed and shook her head as she rose to leave. The Princess gave M. de Lancy's arm a dainty little blow with her fan, saying:

"Monsieur, will you tell M. Caryl I should like to see him after the next act. *Au revoir, ma belle,*" and she kissed Helen on both cheeks, whispering as she did so, "Would you like me to take him off your hands?"

"Oh, madame! if only you would!" was Helen's earnest reply; then she took her bouquet and fan and left the box.

The Princess's words troubled her. How could such a report have been spread unless it had originated with her mother or Philip?

"Oh, Ray, my darling, if you were but here to put an end to this persecution!" was the unspoken cry of her heart; and she sighed so heavily that M. de Lancy was quite concerned, and pressed the little hand lying on his arm a trifle closer.

CHAPTER XXII.

NEWS FROM THE CAPE.

HELEN'S bedroom in the Hotel Bristol was a charming apartment, and looked especially so one early February afternoon, with a bright fire *à l'Anglais* bringing out the sweet odours of the bouquets of violets on the mantel-shelf. A steaming cup of chocolate stood on a little table by a low couch, just brought in by Mrs. Gibbons, Helen's maid.

Nell lay back upon her satin pillows, her hands clasped beneath her head, the deep lace of her sleeves falling back and disclosing the lovely round white arms, her eyes fixed upon the fire.

"I wonder if the mail is in to-day," she thought; "if so, I ought to have a letter from Sylvia to-morrow. How shall I get

through this long day? Pray God my darling is safe!"

Mrs. Gibbons glanced at her somewhat nervously, as she proceeded to lay out her dress for the evening, a pale, anxious expression on her round healthy face; and presently Helen became aware of her changed countenance, and said kindly:

"Why, nursie, what is the matter? Is anything wrong? Are you well?"

"No, Miss Helen, that is I hope not?" she replied, hesitatingly.

"Nurse, you have had bad news; what is it?" exclaimed her young mistress, impatiently.

"Well, my dear, I have just seen the *Times*, you know it is only just arrived, and there's——there's—rather bad news from the Cape."

"Oh, my God! What of Mr. Vandeleur —quick! tell me the worst: is he safe?" and Helen sprang from the sofa and seized the old woman by the arm.

"Yes, yes, my dear, I believe he is; but,

dear, it is a sad account; there's a good many poor men killed as I well know by name; but you can read it for yourself, Miss Helen, here's the paper."

Helen snatched it from her, and tried to open it, but her hands trembled so violently that she could scarcely do so.

Alas! how many of us have cause to remember that terrible morning when we received the announcement of the massacre of Isandula! How our hearts bled at the terrible account of our brave soldiers fighting for dear life against such overpowering numbers! There was little glory in being trapped like rats in a cage, but the names of many of those gallant men may be proudly added to the already distinguished list of England's heroes!

On that day the voice of mourning and woe rose from many an English home, and as Helen read with anxious eyes and reeling brain the long list of the "killed and missing," the tears fell thick and fast upon the paper.

There were many familiar names amongst that death-roll, some of which recalled visions of ball-rooms, Strauss's valses, race-meetings and flower-shows, in the past season.

But there was no mention of either Raymond Vandeleur or Jack Beresford, and she breathed a prayer of intense thaukfulness that such was the case.

Two days later she received a letter from Lady Redgrave, with the enclosure she had expected.

This was a long and exciting epistle from Raymond, telling her of all his doings since he joined Lord Chelmsford.

Fortunately for him, he and Jack Beresford had gone out with the general against the Zulu force, and so had escaped the awful massacre.

They were both well, though there was much sickness in camp, the Zulus having carried off quantities of clothes, blankets, and medicines, and the nights were cold and rainy.

"You seem so very very far away from me, my Nell," he wrote, "your sweet face seems like a dream to me in my thoughts, amidst all the suffering and misery that surrounds us. So many of us have lost dear friends and comrades in that terrible slaughter; and, as you may well imagine, we are not in the highest of spirits. Jack keeps us alive, he is, as usual, full of his jokes. But I think we are all animated with one spirit, revenge; and I pity the Zulus who are next time within a few yards of us. As to myself, I am fast becoming the most blood-thirsty fire-eater ever imagined. But, darling, you say nothing of yourself in your letters; I know all that you can tell me of Paris, I want to hear how you are; individually and specially you.

"Are they worrying you, my child? You write as if you were depressed and troubled. Where is Philip? Is he in Paris?"

Helen put the letter down with a deep sigh.

She had carefully avoided mentioning his

cousin, as she well knew that his being in Paris would cause Ray great uneasiness.

Now, she felt obliged to tell him all, and perhaps he would think her wanting in truthfulness for concealing the fact from him.

She hated to give him pain, and she knew that the very name of Philip Caryl, connected in the most trivial matters with hers, had the power to wound her lover more deeply than anything else could do.

The same morning that the account of Isandula was published, Colonel Vyvyan was down early, and peeping into the breakfast room, found his ward with her elbows on the table, poring over the *Times*.

"Really, Evy, I begin to think your heart must be at the Cape, you are always buried in the newspaper," remarked he, laughing.

"Oh! there's such dreadful news, Guardy," replied Evelyn, lifting a little pale face and large brown eyes, swimming in tears, to the Colonel's astonished gaze, as she handed him the paper.

"Oh! Guardy, there are one or two of your old friends killed, and several that Helen Shafto and I have known and danced with many a time!"

"What about Vandeleur?" asked the Colonel, eagerly, taking the *Times*.

"He is not mentioned, so I hope he is safe, and—and—Mr. Beresford, too;" she replied, in a low voice.

The Colonel glanced at her keenly, but she turned away and left the room.

At this time, Mrs. Carlisle was staying at the Priory.

Mrs. Campbell had known her ever since her childhood, and between her and Colonel Vyvyan, in the days before her marriage, there had been a strong flirtation, which might have ended in something warmer had not Mr. Carlisle, with a large income, stepped in in time.

Colonel Vyvyan had always been devotedly thankful for the intervention, but Mrs. Carlisle, having become a lively and charming young widow, was most anxious

to take up the flirtation where it had been so summarily brought to a close; but, unfortunately for her, this, the Colonel did not quite see.

She had been at the Priory a week, and had already got it into her not altogether shallow little head, that he was extremely fond of his ward.

After breakfast on this particular morning, he retired to his particular sanctum, only too glad to get away from his guest's perpetual chatter.

He would have escaped long before, but for a sense of politeness due to her, for his heart was heavy.

In that massacre at Isandula, he had lost two old and tried friends, who had fought with him through the Ashantee campaign. Men, who had been schoolfellows of his and college chums, and staunchest allies in later years.

Meanwhile Mrs. Carlisle had eyed Evelyn's pale, sad face very narrowly at breakfast, and that repast over, she went up to her,

and slipping her hand through her arm said sweetly:

"Shall we go into the fernery, Evy? I want to talk to you about this dreadful news."

Now if Miss Carisford possessed an antipathy it was Mrs. Carlisle. However she acceded to her request, though her thoughts wandered to the Colonel in his dull study, where for the first hour or so after breakfast she was accustomed to read German with him.

The fernery was her special pride.

It was a tiny place built out from the conservatory, the walls being lined with virgin cork, from which sprang ferns of the loveliest and rarest kind.

The temperature being somewhat high, made it a charming resort during the cold weather.

Mrs. Carlisle seated herself in a comfortable chair, and looked up archly at her friend, who took her work and began industriously to stitch at a wonderful table-

cover, destined later on for her guardian's room.

"No wonder you are so anxious to see the papers every mail, Evy," began the fair widow.

"Yes, I am naturally interested in Mr. Vandeleur," replied Evelyn, carelessly.

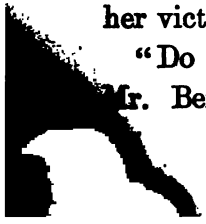
"Ah! to be sure. By-the-bye, what a nice boy that is in the same regiment, Jack Beresford."

This was a feeler, and accompanied by a sharp glance, that had the effect of dyeing Miss Carisford's pretty face crimson.

"Yes," she replied, hastily, "we all like him very much. He is quite a favourite."

"Evidently," thought her tormentor; then aloud, "My poor child, I can well imagine all you feel, and heartily sympathise with you."

"I really do not understand you," began her victim, indignantly.



"Do not be angry dear; I heard that Mr. Beresford had quite lost his heart.

But really, Evy, you are very brave to care for a younger son."

"As if money could make any difference," returned Miss Carisford, hastily, crimsoning again; then, feeling she had committed herself, she stopped short.

"I thought I should find it out," was Mrs. Carlisle's inward comment.

"Will you forgive me when I tell you that I had guessed your secret when staying with Mrs. Beresford last autumn?" she continued.

"You are quite mistaken, there is no secret," said Evelyn, angrily, feeling very much misunderstood.

"Do not be annoyed, dear; it is natural that I should take a great interest in your welfare. I have so little happiness in life now," with a deep sigh, "that I am most anxious to further that of others, and especially yours."

With this touching speech the widow rose, and patting Evelyn's cheek, quitted the green-house.

"How I hate that woman!" was Evelyn's remark when she had gone. "Could Jack have betrayed me? However, there is one comfort, she is quite on the wrong tack."

Mrs. Carlisle swept slowly past the open window, and presently she peeped in. The Colonel was writing busily, but laid down his pen on seeing his visitor.

"Oh, Colonel, pray do not let me interrupt you," said the widow, looking very charming in black velvet and dark furs, as she entered, with a deprecating little smile on her fair face, and sank into the depths of a huge arm-chair which he placed for her.

"I am so grieved at this sad news from the Cape," she began, her blue eyes gazing pathetically at the Colonel.

"It is indeed a bad business," returned he, fidgeting with his letters. She was terribly in his way just then.

"Poor Evelyn! How anxious she must be," continued the widow, with a keen

glance, which somewhat belied her soft, tender manner.

"Why 'poor Evelyn?' I was not aware that she was particularly interested in the Cape news," said he, rather sharply.

"Is it possible that you are not aware?—oh, dear! I fear I have been very indiscreet, but of course I felt sure that you knew," she replied, hesitating a good deal, and pulling a white chrysanthemum to pieces with nervous fingers.

"Pray explain yourself, Mrs. Carlisle," demanded he, haughtily.

"Well, in strict confidence—for Evelyn would never forgive me if she knew that I had betrayed her secret—she is very much interested in young Beresford; in fact, I believe they are engaged."

"Why could he not have spoken to me before he left England?" enquired the Colonel, with a quiver of the lips, hidden by the thick black moustache.

"Probably because he hoped for promotion before daring to aspire to such a

wealthy young lady," replied Mrs. Carlisle, smiling. "But I may rely upon your secrecy," pleadingly. "I had a suspicion of this when I was staying at Mrs. Beresford's, Evelyn's anxiety to see the papers being rather remarkable, and then, you know, we became such friends that she gave me to understand——but, there I must not say any more—I feel a terrible traitor for telling you so much, but when I began I had no idea that you were not in the secret."

And then the fair widow rose, and with a bewitching smile, and a gay little nod of her pretty golden head, sauntered out of the room; feeling that she had done a good morning's work.

The Colonel sat down to his unfinished letter, and commenced writing, but before he had accomplished more than half-a-dozen lines, he laid down his pen, and dropped his head upon his hands.

"Fool that I have been!" he thought, bitterly. "What a cursed fool to dream

that she could ever care for me. I have been blind, mad, but thanks to Mrs. Carlisle I am not likely to drift into such insanity again."

The fire burned brightly in the grate, no sound was heard in the cozy little room save the occasional falling of a cinder, and the snorts and grunts of the Colonel's special fox-terrier, "Bob," who was chasing imaginary rats in his dreams on the rug.

A gentle knock at the door was unheard, and after a moment's pause, the handle turned, and Evelyn's face peeped in.

She stood frightened and irresolute for an instant on the threshold, as her eyes fell on her guardian's bent head; then, with an impulse of pity, she went hastily forward and laid one hand upon his shoulder.

He started up, extreme grief and care written upon his countenance.

Guardy, I am so very sorry for you, I knew that you would feel the loss of your old friends most deeply. I have been wanting to come to you all the morning,

but Mrs. Carlisle prevented me," she said, her soft brown eyes looking their sweetest at him.

He shakes his head sadly, "Evelyn, there are some things worse to bear than death."

"What do you mean?"

"I cannot tell you, childie; but I have been digging a grave, and burying therein a foolish dream of confidence, and hope," and he laughs bitterly.

"Have you had more bad news in your letters?" she enquires.

"Yes, I have had very bad news."

"Not about the Cape?" she asks, with anxiety.

He looks at her searchingly.

"No, Evelyn, nothing to do with the Cape," then with a sudden movement, he bends down, and taking the two little white hands resting on the arm of his chair, says with earnestness:

"Evelyn, have you nothing to tell me?"

She, thrilled with the passion in his eyes and voice, turns crimson and then pale.

He watches the half-frightened expression of her sweet face, the fading colour, the tremulous mouth, then he carries the two soft hands swiftly to his lips, and kisses them tenderly.

Her sudden pallor has confirmed Mrs. Carlisle's words. "Why should she thus change colour if there is nothing to conceal," he thinks.

The next moment she found herself put gently from the room, and heard the key turned in the lock. Gaining her own apartment, she sat down and gazed blankly at the fire.

She felt paralyzed; the remembrance of that look, of those kisses, raised a tumult of utterly mad, delirious happiness in her breast. Then overcome with surprise and emotion she threw herself upon the rug before the fire and burst into tears.

END OF VOL. I.